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Calculating the political

Election manifestoes as the meeting point for experts and politicians in the Netherlands: the case of the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM)

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Abstract

Perhaps unique in the world is the Dutch practice of calculating the effect of political manifestos by (government) expert institutes. The first expert institute to do this was the Central Planning Bureau, which predicted the economic effects of full implementation of election manifestos. These 'calculations' function as a seal of (dis-)approval in the public debate in election time: the CPB tends to predict for each party the future development of important indicators such as unemployment, government debt, etc. Mimicking this practice at the request of various political parties, the Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) started calculating the environmental effects of election manifestos in 1994 and repeated this exercise in 1998 and 2002. This paper describes the interaction between political parties and RIVM experts in 2002 and provides an attempt to uncover the relationship with the political parties that RIVM experts had in this particular instance. A model describing four possible interactions between politics and science is used. The conclusion is that in terms of this model, the RIVM/politics interaction in the calculation of election manifestoes can best be described as technocracy.

1. Boundary work

1.1 Essentialists' perspective on the relation between science and politics: knowledge utilization

Many scholars have problematized the relation between science and policy. Science and policy are seen as different cultures with different goals, interests, rationalities, responsibilities, quality criteria, jargon etc. (e.g. Caplan 1979; Rich 1991). Authors that can be grouped under the label of the so-called knowledge utilization studies¹ use essentialist and universal criteria to make distinctions between the domains of science and policy. Knowledge utilization implies that politicians use the scientific knowledge provided by scientists. There are relatively straightforward criteria for evaluating the science/policy interaction. Scientific knowledge was to be scientifically sound, objective and unbiased, and was to be properly communicated to the policy makers. This results in standard images of science and policy that seem almost mutually exclusive (see table below).

Policy	Science
Values	Facts
Interests	Neutral, disinterested, independent
Subjective	Objective
Ideology	Truth
Opportunistic, bargaining, negotiations	Standardized methodology

1.2 Constructivists: attention to boundaries

The relation between science and policy has also been analyzed from a social constructivist perspective (e.g. Jasanoff 1990; Halfman 2003; Turnhout 2003a). Authors from this line do not refer to universal criteria and standard images but acknowledge, as Miller (2001) has put it, that science and policy can be understood as labels for distinct forms of life. Although authors from this perspective deny the existence of universal boundaries between science and policy and of essentialist criteria to base that demarcation on, they do not deny differences and boundaries as such. Their main argument, following Gieryn (1983; 1995), is that the drawing of boundaries, referred to as boundary work, is a strategic and context specific activity. That is, different actors use different criteria to draw boundaries in different places in different contexts and for different reasons. In that sense, boundaries can be seen as real and do become institutionalized in certain routines, rules standard procedures, and conceptualizations (Halfman & Hoppe 2004). However, boundaries do not come out of the blue, but are forged through human activity ('boundary work'/'boundary traffic', *ibid*; Hoppe, 2002).

¹ For elaboration on the knowledge utilization perspective see for instance Turnhout 2003b; Turnhout & Leroy 2004 or Halfman & Hoppe 2004.

Boundary work includes activities that are undertaken to demarcate science from politics, but also the activities that are undertaken to coordinate the activities in the two spheres. Starting point is the fact that scientists do not just provide policy makers with instrumental knowledge, but also with strategic advice, new ideas for how to define problems and goals, with help in structuring policy debates, and with political support when needed (Halffman, 2003). The degree to which this occurs says something about the boundary between science and politics. As a result the boundaries may stay relatively clear, but sometimes they become blurred. The interest is then to “*show how boundaries are drawn, how these patterns vary under different conditions, and what the consequences of various patterns are*” (Halffman, 2003).

The relevant conditions that shape boundary work – at least in the sphere of regulatory policy (ibid.) – include the relations between societal actors, the demarcation of regulatory tasks, and the pattern of involvement of legal institutions. In the context of such broad macro conditions scientists and politicians are dependent on each other in various ways. Expertise can for instance help politicians in providing relatively stable points of reference in decision-making. Politicians can help experts by stimulating the emergence of certain areas of expertise by funding research programs.

1.3 The effectiveness of science politics interactions

Authors from both the knowledge utilization school and the constructivist perspective have been concerned with the issue of how and under what circumstances science can play an effective role in policy. In many cases a special type of knowledge production has been suggested that should be able to effectively mediate between science and policy.

Weinberg (1972) has put forward transscience as a way to deal with societal questions concerning risk analysis. Funtowicz & Ravetz (1993) have proposed post normal science to solve current complex problems. Jasanoff (1990) has suggested the concept of regulatory science to describe the kind of science that is able to produce ‘serviceable truths’, which satisfy tests of scientific acceptability and support reasoned decision-making. These concepts have one commonality in that they refer to types of knowledge production that have a firm grounding in science but differ from what is generally understood as science in their explicit mission for usability. Furthermore, the cited authors seem to recognize that this might have consequences for scientific validity. Funtowicz & Ravetz (1996) state that for dealing with current complex problems “*science cannot usually provide well founded theories, based on experiments, for explanation and prediction*”. According to Jasanoff (1990), “*the guidelines for validating science in the regulatory context tend to be fluid, controversial and arguably more politically motivated than those applicably to university-based science*”. Weinberg (1985; quoted in Jasanoff 1990) is most explicit in his recognition of a trade off between usability and scientific validity when he writes that for transscience (in this publication Weinberg writes about regulatory science, which can be regarded as synonymous to his earlier concept of transscience) “*the norms of proof are less demanding than are the norms in ordinary science*”.

Regardless which perspective and whether science and policy are seen as essentially different domains or as distinct forms of life separated by strategically drawn, context

dependent boundaries, the development of concepts such as transscience, post normal science and regulatory science reflects the desire for a science that is useful in policy and to have effective interactions between science and policy.

The conclusion that expert advice and policy are ‘co-constructed’ leads to a desire for new criteria to judge the science/policy interaction by (Halffman, 2003). These criteria include: the selective consideration of knowledge, the treatment of competing scientific approaches, and the exclusion of viable policy options a priori (Hoppe, 2002). Whether or not a certain trajectory of science/policy interaction can be considered a success in terms of the just mentioned criteria depends on different conceptions that the actors involved hold of them (Halffman and Hoppe, 2004). Hoppe (2002) has proposed that eight ‘repertoires’ or models or visions on the division of labor between science and politics exist. These repertoires, perhaps best understood in the sense of story lines (Hajer, 1995), indicate what should be the role of scientists and how they must relate to policy makers.

1.4 Discourses on the science-politics interface

The models differ in their assumptions on primacy (either for science or for politics) and the functions of science and politics (divergent or convergent logics). The four most extreme repertoires - to which I limit myself here for reasons of readability - are summarized in the table (based on Hoppe, 2002). The four other models are less extreme combinations on the primacy/convergence axes, with opportunities for dialogue rather than purely primacy.

	Primacy	Divergent/ convergent	Explanation
‘Enlightenment’	Science	Divergent	Science leads to the progress of objective knowledge. Policy should be based on it, but scientists reject the responsibility for this. Normative issues left to politics. Respecting scientific disciplines solves conflicts between types of knowledge. Scientists distrust politics, no place for policy-orientated learning.
‘Technocratic’	Science	Convergent	Scientifically trained persons should hold key positions in government or should de facto hold power. Depoliticization is key. Values are dealt with by reducing them to objectively measurable progress or decline, or by interpreting value statements as ‘merely’ emotional statements. Lay knowledge is not credible, scientists free to impose their understanding of the good on other. Uncertainty should be dealt with by quantitative and probabilistic tools. No political action should be taken until research has shed light on issues. Politics generates legitimacy for the scientifically based policy.
‘Classical bureaucratic’	Politics	Divergent	Knowledge workers are hired at the service of political power. Value issues are a political prerogative. Value statements are step by step translated into rules and instructions for implementing bodies. Research supports instrumental learning by the bureaucracy. Conflicting knowledge claims are solved by specialization or turf. Experts are part of the bureaucracy and enjoy privileged access to information. Citizens can exercise influence by electing the political elite. Uncertainty needs to be tamed by rule making and enforcement. Research and development work is ensnared in hierarchical planning and control mechanisms.

'Engineering'	Politics	Convergent	Research is a social technology for the planned construction of society. Knowledge and knowledge workers do not need to be incorporated in state institutions. Political leaders articulate knowledge questions and assign research projects to experts. Knowledge engineers apply existing bodies of knowledge for solving local problems. In case of conflicting knowledge claims, the state can distance itself. Incrementalistic approach to problem solving, trial and error.
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1.5 Institutionalization and structuration

Having outlined these four basic discourses, one may ask how to use these in the analysis of actual boundary work in an empirical sense. My personal interest (see a.o. Huitema, 2002) is in two aspects of these discourses, which are called institutionalization and structuration (also see Hajer, 1995). I shall be looking at one specific locus of boundary work for institutionalization in the sense that the formal and working rules that are supposed to guide the behavior of participants in ongoing boundary work there reflect either of these discourses. For my analysis of rules, I will use some of the types as developed by Ostrom (1986). I will mainly look at 'boundary rules' that determine who is in and who is out of the exercise, and by which conditions. Then I will pay attention to 'authority rules' that prescribe who can take which actions, how actions are ordered, processed, and terminated (i.e. competencies). And thirdly, I will discuss 'information rules' that establish information channels, state the conditions under which they are open or closed, create an official language, and prescribe how evidence is to be processed. After having analyzed institutionalization of discourses I will assess whether these rules actually structure behavior of the participants, or alternatively whether the participants behave very differently in reality. Before detailing what will be the locus of boundary work that I analyze, I first introduce the way I see the connection between the four discourses and the just described rules.

1.6 Connecting discourses and institutional arrangements

For *enlightment* thinkers, usability of scientific findings is automatic, because science relates how the state of the world is. Politicians should therefore base their decisions on the most recent scientific insights. However, this is their responsibility in the minds of enlightenment thinkers, not the role of experts as they purchase their own research interests and act independently. In addition, science is value free and if value issues are at stake, it is up to politicians to decide. So in terms of boundary rules, enlightenment thinkers argue for a clear separation between politics and science. Science must be (curiosity) self-steering, not policy driven. In terms of information rules, politicians and experts are supposed to have separate contributions: experts contribute facts, and politicians values. In terms of authority rules, boundary work - in the sense of connecting scientific findings and policy conclusions - is considered the work of politicians.

For *technocratic thinkers*, there should be little separation between experts and politics. In fact, they consider expertise so useful for government policy that they feel that experts (authority rule) should hold powerful positions and that the role of the remaining politicians is to gather support for policies (information rule). As an information rule, value statements are considered merely emotional and should be translated to objectively

measurable units, which can be used to optimize decisions (utilitarian thinking). As a boundary rule, science is supposed to develop independently from politics, and the flow of information (information rule) is one-sided, from experts to politics. In terms of boundaries, technocratic thinkers see very little distinction between politicians and experts. In fact, one considers it necessary that politicians are experts (authority rule). Decisions are to be based on scientific knowledge (information rule), and what is left as a pure political task is the one of gathering support for the solutions that are chosen (boundary rule, authority rule).

Classical bureaucratic thinkers do not see a great role for scientific independence (boundary rule). In fact, experts are to be subject to hierarchic control (authority rule), and the purpose of research would be to facilitate learning by the government (information rule). Research should not touch upon value issues, as these are the prerogative of politicians (boundary rule). When politicians make value statements, experts should help translate them into rules and instructions for (the rest of) the bureaucracy (authority rule). The possibility of different knowledge claims is acknowledged, but will be solved by determining who is the appropriate organization in a certain matter (boundary rule, authority rule).

Thinkers in the line of *engineering* see no independent role for experts (boundary rule). Rather, they should engage with the politicians in a process of collective problem solving (authority rule). The common goal is the construction of a certain type of society that needs to be attained by measures taken in an experimental fashion (social engineering). Politicians steer this process (boundary rule) and expertise is assumed to be very usable (information rule).

I will use the just discussed theoretical notions on boundary work to reflect upon the work that the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) has done in calculating elections manifestoes. Before that, I will describe existing insight in the process of manifesto calculation, some bits of the relevant context and then the way the RIVM has gone about calculating election manifestoes.

1.7 The Dutch RIVM as the locus of boundary work

In the Netherlands, there is a tradition to produce scientific assessments and evaluations of policy to inform policy makers that can be studied productively from the perspective just sketched. Many organizations, including advisory councils and so called planning bureaus engage in this activity (for an overview see Halffman & Hoppe 2003). This documents illuminates the practice of involving planning bureaus in making government policy. The focus will be on one particular planning bureau and one of their activities more specifically.

The planning bureaus are small (hundreds of officials at most) subsets of the public bureaucracy, but relatively influential. Started in the aftermath of the Second World War and originally intended (by social democrats) as a key ingredient in a plan led economy, they have evolved to locations where experts with scientific training collect and interpret scientific data and make them applicable to public policy. The Dutch economy is nowhere near a plan led economy, yet the planning bureaus (one for the economy (CPB), one for social and cultural affairs (SCP), one for environment and nature (RIVM) and

one for Land Use Planning (RPB)), have an important status in the corporatist and bargaining traditions of Dutch government.

The planning bureaus play a key role in establishing the facts that need to be taken into account when politicians – often in close cooperation with interests groups - make public policy. What's more, they play an active role in shaping public policy by judging policy proposals that are made by said parties. This document is not so much on the institutional and cultural background of this phenomenon, which is probably in the high degree of corporatism that characterizes Dutch policy making. Rather, I wish to introduce the reader to the practices by one of these planning bureaus, specifically the one that focuses on environmental and nature issues, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM)².

This planning bureau is involved in several different activities that should perhaps be explained so that the reader obtains a feel for the meaning of the term planning bureau. On a yearly basis, the RIVM reports the state of nature and environmental quality and the progress of policy in two separate documents, the 'Nature Accounts' ('Natuur-balans') and the Environmental Accounts ('Milieubalans')³. To assess and evaluate the state of nature and the environment, the RIVM uses so called ecological indicators to assess these states of nature and the environment. About once every four years, Nature and Environmental Outlooks ('Natuurverkenning' and 'Milieuverkenning') are produced. In these reports, different policy scenarios are explored and tested for their future effects on the state of nature and the environment. Besides these structural activities, the planning bureau is also involved in ad hoc activities, such as ex ante evaluations of policy plans or in response to specific policy questions.

For many of their activities and products, the RIVM relies heavily on knowledge and insights from natural science (mainly ecology, earth science and chemistry). For example, the ecological indicators presented and the computer models used are based on data and knowledge about abiotic characteristics in sites, trends and distributions of species, ecological cause and effect relations etc. From a pool of scientific knowledge, the RIVM selects data and knowledge and integrates and translates it into usable knowledge for policy. The RIVM aims to establish authority by developing products that are both scientifically valid and usable at the same time. However, as scientific validity is often claimed to depend on distance from policy while usability is claimed to depend on closeness, the RIVM's job description involves a dilemma, which can be analyzed by applying the concept of boundary work. This document analyzes one element of the

² On 1 January 2006, the planning bureau tasks at the RIVM were hived off, and the independent Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (Milieu- en Natuurplanbureau, MNP) was established. The MNP was put on the same footing within the government as the other three planning bureaus (that is, directly under the Secretary General of the ministry that provides the main funds). This document describes activities from before 2006; therefore most of the interviewees refer to the RIVM. In this document I am connecting to this practice and use of language by my interviewees and will refer to the RIVM throughout the text whilst being aware that MNP would at the time of writing (but not the time of observation) be a more precise term.

³ The activities are now done by the MNP.

RIVM's work, the one of 'calculating election manifestoes' in 2002, from that perspective.

2. Calculating election manifestoes, risks and advantages

2.1 Introduction

The Netherlands has a unique tradition in that most political parties – prior to finalizing these documents – hand their political election manifestoes to two ‘planning bureaux’ for calculation of effects. These ‘planning bureaux’ are the Netherlands’ Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (or in Dutch Centraal Plan Bureau, abbreviation used here: CPB) and the National Institute for Public Health and Environment (RIVM). Both bureaux are part of the central government bureaucracy and resort directly under a member of the management team of their respective ministers⁴.

Even though the phenomenon of ‘calculating election manifestoes’ is relatively new, it has quickly become part and parcel of the Dutch election process. Even to such an extent that most insiders can hardly imagine an election without these calculations. It is common to refer to the outcomes of the calculations as a ‘stamp of approval’ from the ‘masters of calculation’ (‘rekenmeesters’), needed to be considered worthy to participate in the government (coalition) or in fact, be a credible political party⁵. However, from the perspective of an outsider to Dutch political culture, the phenomenon is odd, as it would seem that the ‘calculation of the political’ potentially takes out the politics of an election, thereby shifting the boundary between experts and politics. It will be interesting to observe whether the participants experience the exercise as such or not.

The first time such calculation took place was in 1986, with the CPB to be the organization to do this. The CPB focuses on macro-economic impacts of election manifestoes, which is, also according the CPB itself (Don, 2003: 22-23), a relatively narrow focus. Following an offer to the political parties in 1989 by the Environment Minister, the RIVM followed suit and started doing calculations in 1994, but then focusing on environmental impacts. The work of the RIVM is the focus of the current report, and the author wishes to analyze the calculation of election manifestoes by this bureau in the election year 2002.

Why would the political parties embark on an exercise like this one might ask? The people I have spoken on the topic stress the advantage of increasing comparability between political parties, as they are all assessed using the same method and outcomes are presented in a uniform way. I have not studied which party decided to have its manifesto calculated first, but it is clear that the phenomenon of ‘herding’ is present in the sense

⁴ In the case of the CPB this is the Ministry of Economic Affairs, in the case of the RIVM the situation was more complex with funding coming from the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture. For the calculation of election manifestoes, the Minister of the Environment was the one Minister formally assigning the task of calculating the manifestoes to the RIVM.

⁵ For example, the Socialist Party indicated that, according to internal evaluations, not participating in the calculation exercise had cost the party one seat in Parliament in 1998 (which is quite significant for such a small party). Mr. Irrgang, The Hague, 12 August 2004.

that political parties only wish to participate in the calculation process if other parties also participate and are afraid of stepping out if others do not step out.

“With the CPB calculation, 80% of the political relevance is in the fact whether you have or have not done the calculation. It is a mechanism of approval. In 1998 we asked NYFER [a consultancy presenting itself as an alternative to the CPB, DH] whether they were willing to do the calculation for us instead of CPB. They refused”⁶.

“Groen Links had extensive debates about the usefulness of the calculation process, with one wing of the party wanting to stick to the image of a party that is different, one wing aiming for credibility and expertise as the image with the voter. Once this debate was closed, nobody mentioned this any more.”⁷

The practice of calculating election manifestoes by RIVM originates in 1994, even though the offer to start doing this was already made in the 1990s. According to one of my interviewees, calculating election manifestoes before 1994 may have been impossible:

“Minister Nijpels suggested to start doing the calculations, he suggested it the parties for the 1989 elections but it didn’t happen then. One factor influencing the debate is the fact that it actually became possible to do this type of analysis after ‘Zorgen voor Morgen’, which was a broad and encompassing analysis. We really developed the tools for this type of analysis after 1989. The work is methodologically an outgrowth of the work done for the second National Environmental Policy Plan, where we already paid much attention to the effectiveness of possible new measures.”⁸

In 1994, the two most motivated parties did however knock on the RIVM’s door. It seems that ‘herding in’ was present at the time, with some parties following Groen Links and D66 with much hesitation.

“Groen Links and D66 were the parties that came by early, especially Groen Links, they already came by in 1992. [...] The other parties came by later, about a month before the elections. Especially with CDA and VVD I felt they felt compelled to join but did not really want to do it. The CDA chairperson had many questions about our precision.”⁹

“The parties initially had reservations about the idea of having their manifestoes calculated. The Minister was enthusiastic as was RIVM’s director. One element in the decision process was the fact that political parties were afraid to be burned in the press by environmental ngo’s for not participating in the calculation process. Groen Links was ahead of the other parties, we pleaded with the PvdA to follow suit”¹⁰.

⁶ Mr. Irrgang, The Hague, 12 August 2004.

⁷ Mrs. Streefkerk, Den Haag, 1 September 2004.

⁸ Mr. Wieringa, RIVM, Bilthoven, 31 August 2004.

⁹ Mr. Wieringa, RIVM, Bilthoven, 31 August 2004.

¹⁰ Mr. Van den Biggelaar, Utrecht 31 August 2004. Groen Links means ‘Green Left’, or perhaps more simply, the Greens.

2.2 Calculating election manifestoes: existing knowledge from the CPB experience

There is little academic work on election manifesto calculations by the RIVM. This is different in case of the CPB, for which Graafland and Ros published an edited volume in 2003. Although the perspective of boundary work was not used in this volume, there are hints of various boundaries and the way in which they are drawn.

One example of boundary work – literally – is the determination of the boundary rules: who is ‘in’ the exercise of calculating and who is not. It appears that the interaction between planning bureau and political party is normally in the hands of a limited number of people (Den Butter, 2003: 35). From the planning bureau side, probably by prerogative of the management, ‘issue specialists’ are involved, that is, those people who have experience in building and then applying CPB models for a certain policy domain such as higher education or the environment. These models tend to be based on neo-classical economic assumptions. Involved from the political party’s side are party leaders; these also decide which ‘issue specialists’ from Parliament (tax and economic spokesmen) will be involved. These MPs then take their assistants, people from party think tanks (‘scientific bureaus of the parties’, sponsored by state subsidies), and sometimes people from the party headquarters with them.

In terms of authority rules: it is reported that the degree to which these people can authoritatively speak for their parties in the calculation process is dubious. The CPB places this problem squarely in the domain of the political parties themselves because “*CPB cannot and should not interfere with decision-making procedures of the various parties*” (ibid.: 25).

There are other boundaries too, such as the ones between the parties. As a boundary rule, it is custom not to communicate the brilliant plans any party might have to other parties. But instrumental learning is just a matter of time. The CPB experience demonstrates a learning curve in the sense that because of the repeated interaction between political parties and CPB over the following elections, political parties detect the most important drivers in the CPB models (in this case, essentially labor costs). Parties can and do take this into account, and in the process. There is no information rule prohibiting parties from picking up ideas from each other after the calculation has been completed. Therefore they see which proposals were put forward by other parties, and which ones of those worked and which ones did not (at least in the world of CPB models). This is not inconsequential. Den Butter (2003: 40) speaks of a “*remarkable convergence of policy plans*”, which makes the whole exercise a potential cause of political lock-ins and is somewhat disconcerting from the perspective of political diversity.

When summarized (Keuzenkamp, 2003: 4) the supposed advantages of the CPB exercise have a distinct technocratic ring to them mainly because it seems that the experts are on top rather than on tap and because there seems to be an implicit belief in the existence of optimal policy choices. It is remarkable how open many of the CPB officials involved are about some clearly technocratic aspects. The advantages are considered to be located

in the disciplining¹¹ and comparability creating character of the exercise. With pleasure it is concluded that parties are kept away from election promises that are unrealistic and the parties' manifestoes are presented in a comparable fashion.

Obviously, some of the advantages sketched can be regarded as downsides as well. Why should certain (economic) indicators such as government deficit and debt be so sacrosanct that they are more important than a good system of health care? Why should all parties be comparable and why should the parties receive help from non-elected public officials in presenting their election manifesto in a rather non-transparent process? And if it is a good thing that parties can be compared well, is it also a good thing that their ideas become practically the same? These are some of the questions and ideas that I will take into the next paragraphs, which are on the RIVM.

2.3 The specificness of RIVM calculation

There are several reasons to think why the RIVM's experience in calculating election manifestoes in respect of environmental effects will be somewhat different from the CPB's. For starters, the RIVM started later than the CPB with calculating election manifestoes. What's more: the RIVM calculations are generally deemed to be of less importance than those of the CPB. This is perhaps related to the fact that they do not concern the economy but the environment and is visible in for instance the lower level of media attention and the absence of references to the results in election debates. In various ways, the RIVM's calculations are an addition to the CPB's. For instance, they are made later and have to heed the assumptions made by the CPB. The RIVM's calculations are based on a completely different set of models (see Appendix II). They start with emissions, go to concentrations and then to impact on the environment. There is an extensive set of parameters – outlined in the National Environmental Policy Plans – that is used to judge these impacts. This set is considerably more specific and extensive (many sorts of pollution are covered) than the CPB's set of parameters, which tends to focus on parameters such as unemployment and government deficit. Only some of the CPB parameters (mainly government deficit as percentage of gross national product and then only since

¹¹ The calculation process by the CPB is disciplining in various ways. Firstly, all parties must buy into a so-called baseline scenario, which is an image of the near future in economic terms and assumes certain definitions for unemployment, budget, and etcetera. Different expectations or interpretations have to be left behind and raising questions about these matters is described as 'quibbling about background numbers' (ibid.). An important part of the baseline scenario is the so-called budgetary space, the amount of government monies available for additional public spending, which is established by a group of high ranking public officials from ministries and the central bank on the one hand and the Social Economic Council on the other in the year before the elections. Secondly, for the manifestoes to be calculated, they have to be translated into concrete measures, which requires an additional level of concreteness. The practice of calculation goes further than that however: the planning bureaus retain the right to determine whether certain proposed measures are technologically, institutionally and economically feasible. If not, they will not analyze these measures and act as if the measures do not exist. Thirdly, and in line with this, if monies are required to take certain measures, the source of these monies has to be revealed (no such thing as a free lunch). Finally, the two calculations (CPB and RIVM) are linked so as to prevent the occurrence of 'inconsistent' policies.

the introduction of the Euro) have target values that are binding for all parties, although the parties have a very strong electoral incentive to be fiscally conservative.

2.4 Starting point for RIVM: enter the world of budgetary space and policy shortages

As part of their effort to analyze the 2002 election manifestoes, CPB and RIVM started working on the development of the so-called Medium Long Term (MLT) economic scenario in 2001. This scenario was mainly a product of the CPB and it was the institute's best guess of the development in major economic parameters for the period 2002-2006 under the assumption of unchanged government policies. The document itself became available in November 2001 and was the first indication of tougher economic times for the Netherlands in about a decade. An important concept in the MLT scenario is 'budgetary space'. The concept indicates, applying a certain maximum government deficit (currently based on European Union treaties) and an assumption about the desired level of government debt, how much the next government will be able to spend freely. Given the worsened economic situation, the 'budgetary space' decreased considerably as compared to the predictions that were made early 2001. This was to the horror of certain parties who had already started preparing the groundwork of their manifestoes.

In the year 2002, the Netherlands had gone through a period of economic upturn (about 4% annual growth) in the seven or eight years before. This growth had surpassed CPB's cautious predictions made in 1998 and 'budgetary space' ballooned. Because all political parties had had their manifestoes calculated by the CPB in 1998, there were relatively few concrete ideas for spending the 'additional money', although the Conservative Liberals (VVD) had a preference for tax cuts and debt reduction and the Social Democrats a preference for government investments in education and health care. The structural effect of eight years of surprisingly high economic growth rates, was that several political parties were starting to see the CPB as a too conservative agency and pushed for a less conservative growth prediction in 2001. The CPB withstood this pressure however and did continue to apply conservative growth estimates (1.5% economic growth). The RIVM also used these conservative estimates (that later turned out to be way too optimistic anyway).

Within RIVM, the calculation of election manifestoes fell under the remit of the group that was also responsible for the Environmental Outlooks ('Milieuverkenningen', see e.g. Van Asselt, 2000). The group was supported by experts from other parts of the RIVM. The RIVM spends about 1.5 to 2 person years in the calculation process. At the time of the preparations for calculating the election programs, the fifth outlook had just been published (year 2000), giving the RIVM a good starting point for the calculation.

The first step was an assessment of changes in government policies since that period. This resulted in a long table of four pages with about 120 new measures that were decided by Cabinet or were to be decided by Cabinet at the time. This was combined with long standing government goals from the National Environmental Policy Plan (Fourth version). By the time the CPB had its note on the Budgetary and economic outlook ready, the RIVM team sent a note ('Note on policy shortages Nature and Environ-

ment in 2010'¹²) to all political parties indicating areas where additional policy measures could be taken. The accompanying letter to the political parties indicated that

“This note is meant as a helping device for the political parties in making choices for those nature and environmental problems that they want to address first. In view of the fact that the CPB has at the same time submitted a note on the budgetary space for the coming Cabinet period (2003-2006), parties can weigh their ambitions in the fields of environment and economy against each other”¹³.

The ‘policy shortages’ are summarized in a table with some explanatory text. The table below is an excerpt of the much larger table in the note on policy shortages.

Policy shortages environment	Target 2010	Prognosis 2010
Greenhouse emissions (CO-2 equivalents)	220-224	224-228
SO-2 emissions (ktons)	46	65-72
Nox emissions (kton)	238	270-290
Acidification (mol acid equivalents annual average NL)	2150	2500
Noise disturbance (number of houses above 70 dB(A) because of national (rail)roads ¹⁴)	0	40.000-50.000
External safety (number of facilities where individual risk of death is higher than 10 ⁻⁶)	0	625-725

With footnotes in the table, the readers are warned of different assumptions that are made (i.e. the lower and the higher growth scenario that is used for assessing future greenhouse gas emissions) and uncertainties such as the fact that risks in smaller facilities are unknown (external safety). The explanatory texts in the note differ strongly in character. In general, the texts on nature policy are neutral, merely indicating whether goals are achieved or not. In the part of environmental topics (problems outlined in the table above), the texts are more pressing. The text on acidification calls for extra measures, the text on noise disturbance is relatively graphic as it describes the health effects of too high levels of noise, and under external safety a relatively large piece of text is devoted to the risks of those living under the airport, indicating that these risks are related to the number of flights rather than an efficient use of airstrips (as the policy is assuming). Logical for a note on ‘policy shortages’ is that in none of the texts there is an indication that policies are achieving targets even though such policies exist. In that sense, the note is one-sided.

¹² ‘Notitie Beleidstekorten Natuur en Milieu in 2010’. Sent to all political parties on 21 November 2001.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Example only. Noise disturbance also includes noise from airports and noise in natural areas.

3. Institutionalization: rules of engagement

3.1 Formal rules: protocol and rules of play

When one is looking for hints on institutionalization, the first place to look is the place where these rules may have been written down. At the most general level, such rules are to be found in the protocol that the four Dutch planning offices, including RIVM, have drafted with the government (ODP 1996)¹⁵. This protocol is particularly concerned with two boundaries: the one between relevant and irrelevant knowledge, and secondly the one between independence and dependence of the planning bureaus. The document indicates that the planning bureaus should produce policy relevant knowledge, but at the same time must (be seen to) operate independently from the government. To guarantee policy relevance the protocol contains several procedures wherein policy makers and government officials are involved. For example, the directors of the planning offices are expected to report regularly to government and the working programs of the planning offices are formally adopted by their respective ministers. On this, the protocol indicates that:

“The planning office function involves performing scientific outlooks, analyses and prognoses that are relevant for the strategic policies of the government”¹⁶.

“The planning offices are to preserve their reputation as impartial and objective organizations that are loyal to the government”¹⁷.

If these were the only statements in the texts, one could perhaps conclude that relevance were the only goal laid out. However, the protocol puts equal stress on the independence and distance of the planning bureaus from policy makers. The protocol indicates that:

“The independence of the planning offices regarding the contents of their work is guaranteed by regulations, by the independent position of the planning offices within the administration and by rules of the game that have developed in practice”¹⁸.

Whereas this statement leaves some room for maneuvering, the next statement is less ambiguous:

“In performing their duties, the planning offices observe distance from daily policy practice”¹⁹.

And finally, the importance of scientific validity is emphasized:

“The information provided by the planning offices meets scientific standards”²⁰.

To conclude, the protocol emphasizes that the RIVM should be usable and scientifically valid but does not acknowledge that a dilemma might be involved in fulfilling both crite-

¹⁵ This part based on Huitema and Turnhout, 2005. The autor is grateful to Esther Turnhout for allowing use of her material here.

¹⁶ Source: ODP 1996.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

ria at the same time. The protocol does however place the planning bureaux squarely in the remit of the bureaucracy, which need to be loyal to the government (authority rule stressing hierarchy) and their main goal of producing 'policy relevant' information (information rule).

In addition to these relatively generic rules at the planning bureau level, rules were produced specifically for the interaction between RIVM and the political parties during the calculation work. These were laid down in a brief note, the 'rules of play' ('spelregels') that were drafted by the RIVM and subsequently agreed upon by the political parties and the RIVM representatives subsequently.²¹ The complete list of rules reads as follows:

1. All policies that affect the state of the environment, including infrastructure policies, land use planning and agricultural policies), as far as the party in question will introduce it, if in power in the next Cabinet period (until 2006), will be calculated. Effects after that period will be calculated on the basis of unchanged policies at the end of the Cabinet period;
2. The current environmental policies ('standing policies') form the baseline for comparison. If the current government has announced new policies, these will be considered part of the standing policies, if they are sufficiently concrete;
3. When relevant, parties indicate which measures are dependent on economic growth and how they will deal with economic and ecological negative and positive surprises;
4. International policies (including the costs) will be taken into account including an assessment of their likelihood of realization (and if warranted an uncertainty margin);
5. The impacts of environmental measures are calculated for the year 2010 (which is the year for which most environmental goals have been stated). For certain parts of the election manifestoes, the time horizon will be 2020.

In addition to these rules, which are almost all substance related and not about the interaction between RIVM experts and politicians, one boundary rule that is normally in place is temporarily lifted for the calculation exercise. RIVM staff is formally part of the bureaucracy of the national government. This means that their contacts with the outside world, including political parties, are regulated by Cabinet guidelines.²² By 2002, these guidelines detailed that written or face-to-face contacts between Members of Parliament and RIVM officials require ministerial permission on a case-by-case basis.²³ Such permission is normally given and reporting intentions to contact officials is perhaps best understood as a courtesy to the Minister, so that he/she is aware of the contacts that are ongoing. For the matter of calculation election manifestoes, the Minister gives blanket

²¹ Source: RIVM working document 'Verkiezingen en Milieu – spelregels doorrekening verkiezingsprogramma's 2006', written by mr. Maas, January 26, 2001.

²² The regulations in questions are called 'Aanwijzingen inzake externe contacten van rijksambtenaren' (1998). The author thanks mr. Petersen and mr. Maas (both RIVM) for pointing this out.

²³ Since 2002, most of the interactions between RIVM and politicians have been concentrated in a separate and freestanding organization, called the Environmental Assessment Agency ('Milieu en Natuur Planbureau'). This agency has so-called planning bureau status. The Minister directly passes on requests for information from MP's to this bureau. The bureau informs the minister of the answer and makes their answer public. The author thanks mr. Petersen and mr. Maas (both RIVM) for clarifying this.

approval for all contacts between RIVM staff and MP's plus their assistants and high-ranked party members.

3.2 Working rules

The 18 interviews I have held with people involved in the calculation work shed more light on the institutionalization of discourses than the rules laid out on paper. The following rules are applied:

Boundary rules: (1) the people 'in' the exercise are management representatives of the RIVM, experts working at the RIVM, and a small circle of party representatives (either topic specialists in parliament, members of the parties' scientific bureaus, or related academics). (2) The Minister of the Environment offers the opportunity for calculation to those parties that have representation in Parliament. (3) In the determination of the 'realness' of proposed measures, legal hurdles (i.e. EU policies) are considered unchangeable and thus prohibitive of implementing the measure. Societal resistance on the other hand, even if it can be anticipated, is not considered prohibitive of implementing measures.

Authority rules: (1) it is the parties themselves that determine who they send to the meetings with the RIVM and to communicate the outcomes to the rest of the party. (2) The political parties delegate a spokesman that guards the process from their perspective and communicates the outcomes of the meetings amongst political parties to CPB and RIVM. (3) The RIVM assumes in its calculation that, despite the fact that the Netherlands always have coalition governments, the party in question will be the only one in government for the next turn. (4) RIVM experts make determinations about the degree to which measures are 'realistic' and should be taken into account are made by RIVM experts. They do allow however for comments by the parties. In case of disagreement, other experts are consulted.

Information rules: (1) the political parties (as far as already in Parliament) meet and discuss procedure and planning of the calculation exercise amongst each other. (2) The RIVM specialists use the manifestoes to determine which measures each party wants to take. Their interpretation is sent for comment to the parties to see if the information is correct. (3) There is extensive bilateral interaction between RIVM experts and party representatives (mostly assistants to MP's) to get an operationalization of the election manifestoes. (4) The RIVM takes care of a level playing field amongst parties. If RIVM experts communicate a certain new idea to one party, they are obliged to inform the other parties as well.

What the analysis so far obscures to some extent is that it misses the point that the RIVM approach to calculating the election programs is a desire to be consistent with the CPB as much as possible. The CPB and RIVM have developed an active cooperation in which they agree to use the same information about or conception of the economic scenario that will be applied in their calculations, the measures that parties propose in their election manifestoes and the amounts associated with it, and the degree to which measures are considered as realistic. This is quite remarkable as the calculation of election manifestoes for environmental effects arose in a political desire (minister of the Environment, environmental NGO's, several political parties) to have a counter weapon to the CPB analyses of manifestoes that emphasize the economy too much (at least in their opinion).

In the opinion of the RIVM and CPB however, their analyses are related. The first relationship is in the fact that environmental problems are related to economic growth: economic growth often implies increased environmental pressure; sometimes it can imply less environmental pressure. The second relationship is in the fact that environmental policies themselves cost money and are therefore economically salient. Environmental policies may cost the government money, but very often the private sector also has to draw its purse. Although this explanation for having a close cooperation seems rather convincing, it is possible to make a case for not cooperating too closely. This is because, as part of the disciplining role of politicians it sees for itself, the CPB opts for a conservative estimate of future growth rates of the economy and therefore conservative estimates of tax receipts. Although it may be economically prudent to estimate low economic growth rates, from an environmental perspective it would be more prudent to apply a high economic growth rate to see what the worst-case scenario in terms of environmental pressure will be. This issue had in fact already been publicly discussed in 1998 and it then led to various consequences. The first is that in the sphere of climate policies, the RIVM and CPB would start to work with a higher growth rate scenario to be on the safe side. The second effect was that a 'sensitivity analysis' was introduced, which implied that the parties would indicate their preferences for government spending under different economic scenarios²⁴. The third effect was that in the negotiations about the new coalition government, the Social Democrats negotiated with their partners that in years of economic growth beyond 3%, government spending on environmental measures would automatically increase as a rule.

3.3 How is it supposed to work? Like a classical bureaucracy...

I find that the classical bureaucratic discourse works best to encapsulate the way the calculation process is supposed to work. The director of RIVM, Mr. Van Egmond, makes some remarks that are also indicative of this vision. When asked about the relation between politicians and RIVM staff, he indicated that politicians are on top, and RIVM on tap.

*"Politicians are the boss in our model, that's good. If they want to decide something then that is the way it is"*²⁵.

An important boundary in the bureaucratic discourse is the one between views and facts – wherein views are the realm of politics and facts the prerogative of the bureaucracy. This boundary is clearly visible in the way mr. Van Egmond talks about the calculation work:

*"There is a difference between facts and visions, it may happen that a party says they want to achieve the Kyoto protocol but have an empty toolkit. (...) We want to contribute to the quality of the debate in Den Haag, we do this by bringing all the relevant facts and knowledge to the table. If those facts have come to the table, the debate has been good. Compare us to a travel guide"*²⁶.

²⁴ Based on comments to an earlier draft by mr. Petersen and mr. Maas (both RIVM).

²⁵ Mr. Van Egmond, Bilthoven 13 September 2004.

²⁶ Ibid.

The most dominant vision on the calculation work is one of stepwise translating political promises to policy, also a trait of the classical bureaucratic discourse. Says mr. Van Egmond:

“We digitalize policy. If parties select certain goals they can come to us, it is like a menu in a restaurant. For example if they want to reduce CO2 emissions and keep the nuclear power plant Borssele open, then we tell them how much CO2 emissions are being saved. But they have to tell us whether they want the plant open or close it.”²⁷

It is in this vein that the translation of visions to policies is not considered as something very problematic for the maintenance of the ideological profile of political parties, at least by RIVM staff:

“The calculation exercise forces parties not to abandon their vision but rather to make their views more concrete”²⁸.

The matter of bureaucratic turf also figures prominently in the minds of the officials, especially when it comes to the relation between CPB (economic calculations) and RIVM. The officials involved go to great lengths to make sure that the promises that politicians make in the area of environmental policy are ‘paid for’ and accounted for in the CPB analysis. Discrepancies between the statements of both planning bureaus are considered highly disturbing:

“For us (ministry of the Environment, DH) it is sometimes an advantage that more than one planning bureau exists. However if these bureaus make different assumptions, e.g. in the case of airport Schiphol, everybody in the country gets confused and we get confused. Agreements must be reached.”²⁹

Finally, the bureaucratic model does not see a large role in policy making for ordinary citizens, except through elections. The fact that RIVM officially engages in the exercise of calculating manifestoes on behalf of the voter, fits the bureaucratic model. Given the role division between politicians and bureaucracy in this model, giving a direct voting advice would be explained as a reversal of roles. Indeed, the information rules make clear that the communication of the outcomes by RIVM does not include a voting recommendation but that the outcomes must be communicated as a list of strengths and weaknesses of the various parties. As one of our interviewees put it:

“The RIVM’s role is to gather the facts (based or not on models or expert judgment) and leave the conclusions to the voter”³⁰.

In sum, the bureaucratic model holds seems to accurately describe how the calculation of election manifestoes is supposed to work. RIVM staff there does consist of knowledge workers that are hired at the service of political power. At least rule-wise, the institute places itself outside the realm of the issue of values. Because of their status as public

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mr. Honig, Bilthoven 8 September 2004.

²⁹ Mr. Van der Vlist, The Hague, 11 August 2004

³⁰ This from one of the evaluation forms by the participants in the calculation exercise. For reasons of privacy, the person that made this remark cannot be revealed.

officials, RIVM staff enjoys privileges in terms of information that the ordinary public does not have (e.g. on Cabinet decisions).

4. Structuration: does practice follow the rules?

4.1 Herding out

The Dutch elections of 2002 were special because of various reasons. The most important reason was the large degree of political instability due to popular dissatisfaction with government policies. Especially one populist party, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), was able to mobilize support from dissatisfied voters, but its leader was killed by the hands of a militant animal rights activist shortly before the elections. After this first political murder in decades³¹, his party gained 25 seats in the (150 seat) Second Chamber of Parliament. The large gain in the number of seats came at the expense of the Social Democrats (PvdA) and the Conservative Liberal Party (VVD). Both parties were members of the government coalition that had ruled since 1994.



One element that makes the rise of the LPF interesting from the boundary work perspective is the party's rejection of technocratic, inner circle and backroom politics and its will to replace it with 'common sense' solutions. The party was able to portray the sitting government as representatives of 'old politics'. It would lead too far to describe all elements of 'old politics' as the LPF portrayed them to be, but for certain the calculation of

³¹ The last political murders in the Netherlands before this one took place in the Second World War, although depending on one's perspective one could also count the (or some) deaths during Indonesia's independence war as such. The last political murder in peacetime was centuries before that.

election manifestoes and the large importance of the CPB in economic policy making was one of the elements according to the LPF. Their leader broke away from the existing consensus amongst political parties that the CPB should be consulted on economic policies in election manifestoes, talked for a while with a private consultancy firm that presented as an alternative to the CPB, but in the end simply refused to have this done. This refusal also pertained to the RIVM calculation^{32,33}.

Even though not seated in Parliament, Pim Fortuyn's party played a crucial role in the process that would ensue. One of the contentions of Pim Fortuyn was that environmental problems had been solved. His party lent its ear to those scientists that contend that climate change is not occurring. Although it may seem a rather extreme stance, other parties were not considering environmental issues top of their priority list either, if we may believe the media³⁴. Indications for that were the low places of environmental experts on the parties' election list. Media interest in environmental issues was low in general.

As had become normal in the case of calculating the election programs, the Minister of the Environment had offered those parties in Parliament that they could have their manifestoes calculated early 2001. The RIVM was assuming that it would 'calculate' eight election manifestoes: Christian Democrats (CDA), Social Democrats (PvdA), Conservative Liberals (VVD), Progressive Liberals (D66), Green Left (Groen Links, GL), Socialist Party (SP), Christian Union (Christen Unie, CU) and Dutch Reformed Party (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij, SGP). Most susceptible to a critical approach of the existence of environmental problems were the Conservative Liberals (VVD), who spoke out against portraying doom images in connection with environmental issues but concurred that climate change was a major problem.

The refusal by the LPF to have its election manifesto calculated by the CPB and its attack of the concept of calculating election manifestoes in general created a certain level of freedom for other parties. Specifically the VVD now took the decision not to have their election manifesto calculated by the RIVM. In a phone call to the project leader at RIVM, the VVD MP who focused on environmental issues indicated that:

*"[...] calculation requires such a level of concretization of the party's intentions, that the party is not willing to offer it because this is besides the point of an election manifesto and is way too technocratic. The VVD does not recognize itself at all in the set of measures that were calculated in 1998"*³⁵.

³² Even if the party had wanted to have calculations done, this would have virtually been impossible. The calculation exercise takes about five to six months and basically takes place in the full year before the elections. The LPF formed only a few months before the elections, at the latest possible dates under the election law.

³³ After the elections the LPF came to power through a coalition with the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Conservative Liberal Party (VVD). The LPF quickly started suffering from infighting and a lack of leadership and the new coalition government of CDA, VVD and LPF fell only nine months after it was formed. New elections were necessary.

³⁴ 'Het Milieu? Geen probleem!', by Maaïke van Houten, in: Trouw, 20 November 2001 and 'Gevoel van urgentie ontbreekt', by M. Zuithof, in: Milieudefensie, 2002-1, pp. 13-15.

³⁵ Report of the phone conversation in RIVM meeting report of 21 November 2001.

In a more recent interview with me, the (then former) MP added that the VVD had clearly experienced the calculation work on its manifesto as a trespassing of the bureaucratic model and he called the RIVM approach technocratic³⁶.

“In 1998, the calculation contained many things that are not in our manifesto. The calculation is based on an explanation of the manifesto by a few members of the party, and this has nothing to do with the manifesto nor with the members of the party. Something is either in the manifesto or not, one cannot add things to it. I have a philosophical objection to this. [...]”

I am not asking things to RIVM, I am also not asking them for policy discretion. The proper relations are the other way around. RIVM is making an interpretation of election manifestoes that I find methodologically unacceptable [...]

You are giving the power to technocrats; it is MY task to operationalize the election manifesto after the elections. If the manifestoes are too vague in the opinion of RIVM, they should have reported that.”³⁷

The CPB had offered – in addition to its standard calculations- to calculate the effects of the parties in the sphere of education and health care, but the VVD rejected those as well. The party went public with its decision through interviews with national press. The party’s decision was explained by pointing at the ‘qualitative nature’ of RIVM’s calculations and the CPB calculation for education and health care and as compared to the CPB’s ‘macro-economic calculation’, which were said to be necessary by the party to show ‘the coherence and effects of policy plans’³⁸. The qualitative calculations were said to be ‘too political’. The party indicated that its decision had nothing to do with a fear for negative outcomes but with the technocratic nature of the exercise.

“The CPB and the RIVM create a reality on paper. The investments are political choices, these are not the remit of the CPB” [...] ‘This is the world turned upside down. Politics checks the government. Now the government institution CPB threatens to check politics. That was never meant to be’³⁹.

The phenomenon of herding that was present in the case of CPB and initially the RIVM calculations, was now also present but then in reverse. Because the VVD went out, the Christian Democrats (CDA) also withdrew. Their argument for this decision (as communicated to the RIVM) was that the parties had reached an agreement that either all or none would participate in the calculation exercise. As the VVD had withdrawn, CDA now also felt it should withdraw. There was no other motivation than this one. The remaining parties interpreted this as a sign of weakness:

“The reason why the three parties did not have their manifesto calculated is the weakness of their environmental paragraph”.⁴⁰

³⁶ Mr. Klein Molenkamp, Rhon, 8 September 2004.

³⁷ Mr. Klein Molenkamp, Rhon, 8 September 2004.

³⁸ VVD blokkeert CPB-visie op onderdelen van programma, in Volkskrant, undated article found in RIVM archive.

³⁹ ‘Halt aan doorrekenen VVD program, in NRC Handelsblad, 21 November 2001.

⁴⁰ Mr. Pol, Den Haag, 7 September 2004.

The remaining parties stayed in, except the Christian fundamentalist SGP, which indicated to both RIVM and CPB that the party did not have sufficient manpower to work along with the two bureaus. Having lost almost the entire right wing spectrum of political parties, the RIVM faced a dilemma on what to do with the request of the remaining (left wing) political parties to have their manifesto calculated. There was a sense that the added value of the calculation process would be significantly lower but also a feeling that the request of the other parties should not be ignored. It is interesting that no consultation on the situation took place between the RIVM and CPB management on what to do with the situation. There was an agreement in place that parties could not have their manifesto calculated by one planning bureau and then not by another (window shopping)⁴¹, but this rule was not invoked. The parties that had already requested the calculation were taken by surprise by the move of the VVD and CDA and might have reconsidered their request had there been more time⁴². Instead, the process went ahead as normal.

4.2 Boundary objects

4.2.1 Introduction

In this paragraph I want to look into various aspects of the calculation work that could be seen as ‘boundary objects’ in the sense that these objects are the outcome of the boundary work that is done. I start my treatment by discussing how boundaries are drawn between ‘real’ measures (the ones that RIVM can and will calculate) and other - ‘unreal’ - measures. As this boundary is too hard, especially from the perspective of the side of politics, an intermediate category was created, the textbox measure. There is another relevant boundary, which is the one between what can be calculated quantitatively and what not. Under the heading of ‘qualitative assessment’ I show how this difference is perceived by the parties involved. The third boundary object to be discussed are the models that RIVM uses: I shall discuss the extent to which these models are defined as ‘expert zone only’ or whether there is active discussion of these models between experts and politicians. Finally, I present how the boundary between those in the exercise and those outside is crossed. This boundary crossing is supposed to occur through a report with the outcomes. I will show that this report is considered relatively unimportant amongst the participants in the exercise, demonstrating the relatively closed nature of the whole process.

The first step in the exercise is the translation of election manifestoes in measures that can be calculated. There tends to be a gap between election manifestoes and measures that can be calculated in the models applied at the RIVM. The implication is that an effort must be made to ‘operationalize’ the manifestoes. The authority and boundary rules in this part of the exercise are such that this is the prerogative of RIVM officials. From the side of the RIVM, the first step in this is a broad analysis of the election manifestoes, characterizing them in terms of philosophy, analysis of environmental issues and approach towards solving them.

⁴¹ Mr. Van Egmond, Bilthoven 13 September 2004.

⁴² Mrs. Steefkerk, Den Haag, 1 September 2004.

Especially the larger parties have an apparatus (scientific bureau, friendly professors, other networks) that they organize to advise them on certain issues, usually through the publication of reports⁴³. The relationship between these reports, which are often presented to RIVM officials alongside the election manifestoes- and the election manifesto itself is somewhat unclear. Ideally, such reports travel through the party organization and end up in the manifesto by explicit decision of the party congress. This does however not always happen, as the timing of these reports may be off, they are not always intended to be used for the manifesto, etc. etc. Generally speaking, the RIVM is willing to analyze such documents and use them in the operationalization exercise, but the bureau is hesitant as this takes much time. One can imagine indeed that doing this would be haphazard from the perspective of party democracy.

What happens instead is that, after general description of – what are then often still draft versions of– the election manifesto, the RIVM starts making lists of measures that it finds in the manifestoes. This results in a relatively long list with (tens) of concrete measures that the parties want to undertake in the next period and beyond. The ‘rules of play’ of the process are used by the RIVM to distinguish between measures that have to be calculated and measures that will not be calculated. This is to an extent a negotiation process, where judgments of the measures by party representatives and RIVM-experts may differ somewhat and arguments are exchanged. There are many bilateral contacts (e-mail, telephone) between party representatives and RIVM-workers on interpretation of measures.

4.2.2 Measures, real or unreal, normal or textbox?

One boundary that needs to be defined in the negotiation process is the one between real and unreal measures. There are various ingredients for this discussion, the question whether a causal relation can be established between the measure and effects on the floor and the question whether all questions that the RIVM models need answer for have actually been answered. One interviewee explained that it is not always possible to establish a causal relationship between what politicians propose and what will happen in the environment, even if it is obvious that there may indeed be such effects:

*“There are some measures that do not cost money. One example is D66, which said they wanted to introduce integrated water legislation. There is nothing you can say about this beforehand, we are not concerned with administrative efficiency, but we care about the real effects in the living environment.”*⁴⁴

On the matter of causality one of my interviewees explained a difference between experts and politicians related to the values of symbols:

“Some items or statements have political meaning, but RIVM interprets such statements as meaning nothing. It is sometimes of political relevance to say something in

⁴³ One example includes the Social Democratic Party (PvdA), which had instituted a commission to look at the system of land use planning in the Netherlands. Reports such as those are traced by the RIVM, or offered to the bureau by the parties themselves (especially when they are very satisfied with the reports) as a means of further concretization of what the party wants.

⁴⁴ Mr. Ligtoet, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

a certain way, but not according to the RIVM. The issue at stake is the one of symbols, or imagery. Take the issue of deposit money on bottles. It may have little environmental impact, but for the mentality of the population it may be very important. There is a difference between the political work and the RIVM."⁴⁵

In my opinion, a very strong driving force in this boundary work is the very practical matter of the RIVM models needing input before they can be run, and the same type of input from every party. Measures are only real when there are RIVM models that can predict their effects, and visions for the future do not necessarily qualify as such:

"There is a tendency to quantify things, this has its limitations, certainly given the progression that environmental policy is making. The real question becomes more and more: where do we want to go with the Netherlands. Groen Links for instance was particularly interested in new forms of environmental policy for agriculture, they came early and posed a plan: what if we develop the sector in this way? I can only say: it sounds good, but I can't quantify it ... You can imagine a world wherein agriculture is liberalized worldwide and environmental issues are guaranteed, but this can also happen with more market protection."⁴⁶

The reason why the VVD was so upset with the RIVM seems to stem from this aspect:

*"The RIVM does push its agenda on to the parties. They have a certain number of issues they deem suitable for calculation and the parties must answer questions about them, we are just rubberstamping work by the RIVM and they are systematically pressing their opinions on to us. If this implies adding to the manifesto, this means that RIVM is expanding its assignment"*⁴⁷.

As the reader might recall, the VVD did decide to participate in the CPB calculation. The question may be raised whether the RIVM and CPB calculations differ a great deal in this respect. The interviewees of the VVD assert that this is indeed the case; they indicate that all the data needed for the CPB calculation are already in their manifesto, whereas this percentage is much lower in case of the RIVM⁴⁸.

In addition to the model limitations, the 'rules of play' also imply boundaries for what is a real measure and what not. The rules of play forbid the calculation of measures that are introduced after the next Cabinet period and measures that are not in the remit of the national government. This is sometimes disappointing for the parties, especially when they propose that measures must be taken at the local, regional or European levels to address a certain issue, which can be very logical. To alleviate the pressure somewhat, the concept of 'textbox measure' was introduced by the RIVM. The textbox measure is a measure that has not been calculated as such, but is still reported upon in a separate textbox to make the (future) plans of a certain party clear to the reader.

"As is known, measures that have to be taken at the international level (EU) or rather at the local level are outside the realm of measures that are taken into account

⁴⁵ Mr. Pol, Den Haag, 7 September 2004.

⁴⁶ Mr. Van Zeijts, 31 August 2004.

⁴⁷ Mr. Klein Molenkamp, Rhoon, 8 September 2004. Rubber stamping was here used as a translation for the Dutch word 'invul oefening'.

⁴⁸ Mr. Visser, Den Haag, 9 September 2004.

in the calculation. But these measures do get attention in our report, in a separate text box (so called text box measure). In that text box, a description will be given what might be the effect of said measure, the potential, eventually complemented with a number of remarks that add nuance to the discussion or indicate conditions that have to be met”⁴⁹.

The ‘text box measure’ is one indication of the RIVM responding to critique from the political parties. Especially after the 1998 calculation, several parties indicated that they felt there was not enough attention for their vision of environmental problems. In 2002, the RIVM stressed on many occasions that this time there would be place for visions in the calculation effort through the textboxes.

Another factor in the ‘realness’ of measures in reality is the degree to which measures will encounter societal resistance. The ‘rules of play’ indicate that this factor will be ignored in the calculation process. It is clear that the various parties involved dealt differently with this rule. Most people I spoke to from the political side had one or two things to say about plans by other parties that had been ‘approved’ by the RIVM, whereas they themselves had not proposed such measures because they deemed them unfeasible. One example is the matter of underground CO₂ storage, which D66 used to get a good score for climate policy, whereas the PvdA considered such storage societally unfeasible because of public resistance. Because of this, some of the parties such as the PvdA spoke out in favor of including societal resistance in the calculation process. However, the Greens were greatly opposed to any changes in that direction and acted as one of the enforcers of this boundary and information rule:

“We did have discussion with the RIVM about the meaning of the concept feasibility: RIVM started to look at societal acceptance of measures at some point and then we had to tell them it was not their duty to look at that aspect. Their role is to assess technical and institutional feasibility, not social acceptance. If we hear that certain measures are not possible because of EU regulations, we take this into account and talk about it to government”⁵⁰.

It does seem however that ignoring societal resistance comes at a certain cost. It does stimulate parties to some degree to view themselves as being in the cockpit and assuming they are the ones in control. This experience is somewhat alienating from reality, and fits a pattern of Dutch politics relying on planning bureau data for making decisions. This pattern comes under attack every so often, but it does not seem that experts nor politicians want to part with it. One example of a measure that is dubious in my opinion but that was calculated and thus considered real by the RIVM was the so-called ‘open space levy’. Purpose of this levy, that was to be added-on to the land use planning system, is that in cases where open areas that are to be changed into built-up areas, a levy should have to be paid for using this scarce resource. In the process of calculating the funds that would be generated by charging this levy, RIVM officials and party representatives debated even issues such as pipeline projects (building projects where land use permission was already granted) and from there on started calculating its effectiveness and also possible proceedings. I would personally have doubts about the legal and socie-

⁴⁹ E-mail Mr. Van Gerwen to the experts involved, 12 February 2002.

⁵⁰ Mrs. Streefkerk, Den Haag, 1 September 2004.

tal feasibility of such a levy. The last time a proposal was made for such a levy, the government lost its parliamentary majority over it (see Huitema, 2002).

4.2.3 Models

As the models that RIVM uses are the workhorses in the calculation exercise, I found it interesting to find out whether or not the representatives take an interest in the actual content of these models and the thinking behind them. The interviewees agree on the fact that this is not the case. Says one RIVM expert indicates that the review of the models is something that is normally experts' terrain only:

*"We use a chain of models, revolving around the lowering of use of fossil fuels. What is important in the models is the assumptions on price elasticity. Politicians do not question such assumptions. Our models are put for societal review and that is where we get our comments to the models. We also discuss the models between the expert institutes, CPB, ECN and us. Parties could ask an employee to devote time to study the models, but they normally don't. They do respond however when the outcomes are different from what they expected."*⁵¹

The people involved from the political side agree. They point out that the need for them to know the models is limited. First, because, if the models are incorrect, they will be incorrect for all parties alike. Second, because the RIVM calculation is considered less important than the CPB calculations:

*"The models that RIVM uses are a black box to us"*⁵².

"We do not have the time to get to know the models that the RIVM applies. However, you know that the models are used to calculate the scores for all parties".⁵³

"We do not get insights in the models that RIVM applies. This is not possible because of the time pressure we are under. What is reassuring is that if there are errors, these will be similar for all parties".⁵⁴

*"Because it was the first time we participated in the calculation by RIVM, we were not very aware of the models they applied and had little idea on how to influence or steer the outcomes in a certain direction. We are less motivated to find out about these models than we are with the CPB. [...] We have not yet found the trick to devise an effective environmental policy, at least predicted by the RIVM. We knew too little about environmental issues to be able to have criticism of RIVM's models, which we do have with the CPB. The CPB model is more important for us, because if we do not participate in the CPB calculations, we are politically disqualified. The RIVM calculation is less important to us, also because as SP we are slightly suspect in they eye of the voter in terms of financial discipline. Whether we do well or not in the RIVM calculation is less of an issue in the party"*⁵⁵.

⁵¹ Mr. Honig, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

⁵² Mrs. Streefkerk, Den Haag, 1 September 2004.

⁵³ Mr. Koppelaar, Den Haag, 30 August 2004.

⁵⁴ Mr. Stellingwerf, Ede, 6 September 2004.

⁵⁵ Mr. Irrgang, The Hague, 12 August 2004.

So the models are considered to be the prerogative of experts by the politicians, and for various reasons. It does not seem that the experts involved have to do much boundary work, in terms of demarcating 'their' territory to keep this situation as it is. One possible exception of boundary work, but then to demarcate the boundaries between various bodies of expertise, was found however. This example pertains to the issue of noise disturbance, and here RIVM models predicted different outcomes than the models of another expert branch of the government. The Note on policy shortages led to an internal discussion within RIVM about the numbers of houses under stress from noise that had been published. Of 40-50,000 houses reported to suffer from noise above 70 dB(A), RIVM had reported 10,000 to be caused by national roads (highways). This number contrasted greatly with the number reported by a part of the Ministry of Traffic and Water Management, Advisory Service Traffic and Transport (in Dutch AVV), which was 2,600⁵⁶. A comparison resulted in the conclusion that the RIVM and AVV models differed in their assumptions on the speed of traffic and the number of houses affected by noise levels at certain measuring points (100 meter grids versus postal code areas). The experts working on this topic considered these widely different numbers unwanted and already before the election calculation work they had been consulting with their colleagues at the Ministry about the issue to coordinate numbers. It was decided not to repeat the RIVM numbers that had been presented in the policy shortages note. The fact that there were different predictions was not communicated to the politicians involved in the calculation process.

Another interesting aspect, model wise, is the problem that the RIVM ran into various situations wherein there are no quantitative models to predict policy effects. Especially in the fields of water management, nature and landscape policy, policy proposals cannot be judged quantitatively. Instead, qualitative analysis is made by a set of experts. For most people involved in the calculation work this is quite a fundamental difference, with practically everyone, experts and politicians alike, tending to have greater trust in the outcomes of quantitative analyses (with real models) than in qualitative analysis (based on expert theories).

What worried some of the RIVM staff involved about the qualitative judgment was imprecision, a risk of arbitrary judgments and a risk of dissatisfaction amongst the political parties about the judgments. It was felt that a higher degree of procedural safety measures should be incorporated. First measure was the involvement of outside experts from other ministries, to guarantee the validity of judgments made by RIVM experts. The second measure was the development of a standard approach to scoring measures, which was to be approved by high-ranking officials within RIVM before being applied⁵⁷. By February 2002, the officials at RIVM started undertaking efforts to 'streamline' the judgment process by developing a scale (--/++) and indicating how scores could be earned on this scale.

⁵⁶ E-mail messages Mr. Jabben, 1 February 2002 and Nijland, 1 February 2002.

⁵⁷ The director of the Environment Department of RIVM, Mr. Van Egmond, was involved in the final approval of this method. E-mail Van Gerwen, 4 February 2002. In response to an earlier draft, Mr. Petersen and Maas (RIVM) indicated that this type of involvement is not exceptional.

The method was described as follows in a draft note⁵⁸:

1. Standing policies, or rather the goals expressed in them, are the benchmark;
2. A + is given if there is 'substantial reason' to think that nature quality (etc.) will be better off than with existing policies;
3. A = is given when proposals do not add or change the current policies much;
4. A – is given when current policies are weakened.

The officials struggled somewhat with the distinction between intentions and actions. On the one hand the note indicates that 'nice intentions without impact at physical indicators' do not result in points. On the other hand the note indicates that the targets that a political party expresses (intention) is a reason for scoring – or +. There are three other 'criteria' that determine the score:

1. Do the parties name measures with direct (physical) consequences for the environment etc. or not? Examples given include: acquisition of agricultural land for nature creation, adding protective shields against noise, and broadening rivers;
2. Do the parties name the instruments that help the realization of measures; do they mention policy instruments?
3. Do the parties reserve extra monies for the realization of the instruments and measures?

It is interesting to note that the experts are furthermore warned to judge the 'total of the intentions, not individual measures' and 'No money is no effect!'. For each indicator (policy goal) the experts were to indicate what the sum of proposals that the political made would imply for goal realization. This was to be motivated by indicating which group of measures affected the score in a positive sense, which measures affected the score in a positive sense.

The scores and their meanings were proposed to be as follows:⁵⁹

1. = or 0, comparable to standing policies;
2. - less attention than in standing policies (no priority);
3. +, more money and/or measures and instruments than in standing policies (goals of policy unchanged but more instruments);
4. ++, remarkably more money and/or measures or regulation than standing policies (priority, the party is going further than the goals in the basic scenario);
5. ?, too unclear to judge.

The writer of the scoring system warned the experts that 'the final judgment is not a simple average of the scores for each criterion' and that

"the difference between a '+' and a '++' is of course a bit arbitrary. I propose that the leading persons in N&Ls, W, and LO [Laboratories at the RIVM, DH], when the

⁵⁸ 'Voorstel stroomlijning kwalitatieve beoordeling partijprogramma's', RIVM note 4 February 2002.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

*judgments for these subjects are ready, coordinate their minuses and plusses with each other*⁶⁰.

The experts indeed continued to exchange their views on this scoring system. One outcome of that decision was that the ‘?’ score disappeared because it was considered too vague⁶¹.

Most participants from the side of the political parties felt that the qualitative analyses were less valuable than the outcomes of the quantitative calculations. One element of this is the accessibility of scores, which is obviously lower with qualitative analyses. Several of my interviewees indicated that tables with figures are easier to use for quick referencing and that most attention of the reader in their circles would go towards those elements:

*“We did have the feeling that the expert judgments that were made in the calculation process were arbitrary now and then. The plusses and minuses stated there are determined by a few experts. They are not the bread and butter of the report, most attention is focused on the calculations and figures.”*⁶²

4.2.4 The outcomes

There are two important chains of communication after the calculations have been completed. The first one is from those involved to those in the outside world, the second one from participants to the political parties themselves. As a (communication) rule, the general public is informed of the outcomes through a website, through a press release, and a summary of the outcomes. Finally, the outcomes are published in a report. This report was printed 1.500 times and sent to a large number of potentially interested parties. The report was (and is) freely available from the Internet and it was searched around 2,000 times at the time. Press releases were sent out to the press agencies and a press conference was given together with CPB. Most newspapers reported on the calculation exercise but focused on the CPB’s analysis in their reports on the calculation projects and the RIVM staff felt that ‘their’ outcomes were lost in the subsequent media attention.

The 160-page report that gives the outcomes of the calculation are rather difficult to summarize here in a few words. The summary of the report itself is 13 pages long, but most essential is a table indicating the degree to which the election manifestoes of the parties involved would imply an improvement or worsening in comparison with standing policies. I am reproducing a part of this table, including the issues of the ‘policy shortages note’ that were described previously. I have however also added a number of issues that were scored qualitatively. I do not claim to give a representative sample of the summarizing table in the RIVM document, but picked out - in relatively random fashion - some of the issues. The figures in the cells should be read as improvements as compared to standing policies, unless there is a minus sign in front of the number (which is nowhere the case).

⁶⁰ Ibid. The term coordination here refers to the desire to find a consensus on how to score minuses and plusses.

⁶¹ This yet to be researched at the time of writing of this paper.

⁶² Mr. Koppelaar, Den Haag, 30 August 2004.

Party intentions	PvdA	D66	GroenLinks	ChristenUnie	SP
CO-2 emission reduction (billion kilograms)	8.3	12.0	18.8	8.0	12.7
SO-2 emission reduction (ktons)	4	-	24	-	14
Nox emission reductions (ktons)	5	5	24	3	13
Increase of surface in sustainably protected nature (hectares)	3,200	115,000	23,500	2,000	3,400
Noise disturbance (Highroads and railway traffic)	++	=	++	+	=
External safety (not specified)	+	=	+	=	=
Natural areas	+	+	++	+	+
Safety from floods	++	++	+	+	=
Income from env. levies (billion EUROS)	3.9	1.9	15.6	3.4	3.1
Govt. expenditure on env. policies (billion EUROS)	2.0	1.5	0.3	1.1	1.6

The parties are given here in the same order as in the RIVM report and that report ordered the parties according to size (PvdA the largest party in Parliament, SP the smallest). There is no recommendation in terms of which party to vote for if one cares about environmental issues, but it is clear that the Green Left party has excellent scores on almost all aspects and outscores the other parties.

In comparison with the ‘policy shortages note’ several changes have occurred. Some of these relate to relatively unimportant issues such as the choice of units (i.e. CO-2 equivalents is replaced with kilo’s). Another change is that noise disturbance and external safety are no longer expressed quantitatively but qualitatively. Possibly this is related to the discussion about the validity of the numbers given in the policy shortages note.

The table was the main tool for communicating the outcomes of the calculation exercise. The text that is added mainly describes the measures that the parties want to take and how these differ from standing government policies. Now and then, there is also some reference to the likelihood that either standing policies or the measures proposed by the different parties achieve the goals set by government documents (mainly National Environmental Policy Plan). Here and there, graphs and tables are added that help the reader to more quickly get an overview of the outcomes.

When I asked my interviewees from the political parties about their response to the outcomes, most of them mentioned two topics. Some had minor difficulties with the summary. Several of my interviewees spoke of a tendency on the side of the RIVM to give summaries that are not in line with the underlying report. Practically every party has

something to say about the way their manifesto was described by the RIVM, but most of the issues mentioned are relatively minor. The information rule that places watersheds between the various parties obviously functioned well. The publication of the report was the first opportunity for all party representatives to compare their scores to those of other parties and here too, most interviewees made remarks about the RIVM's decision to 'approve' of certain measures or not, and about the judgment of measure effectiveness that RIVM had made.

Given the fact that the calculation is formally done to help the voter determine what is the best party fitting his or her own ideas about environmental issues, it is somewhat surprising how low the expectations are in terms of voters understanding environmental issues and of voters caring about the outcomes of the calculation exercise. RIVM staff see their role as the assistant of the helpless voter:

"The calculation gives citizens insight in the differences between the parties; it gives the parties a platform for creating a certain image. The citizen cannot himself compare the parties with each other".⁶³

However, neither as members of a political party does it appear likely that they will hear of the content of the discussions between their party leaders and the RIVM, as that problem is squarely placed in the lap of those party leaders. It is remarkable to note that literally none of the interviewees thinks that voters are aware or even interested in the outcomes of the exercise, although some say this is very much the same for the manifestoes themselves.

The second aspect of the communication of the outcomes involves the way the party members involved in the exercise communicate with the rest of their party. As is the case with the CPB calculations, the RIVM simply assumes that the concretization of measures, which is really a certain interpretation of the election manifesto, must be communicated to the rest of the party (i.e. party conference, party institutions) by the party representatives themselves. It does however not seem that many of the parties involved take the effort to do this, implying that there is a potentially problematic issue at stake here, not just within the parties, but also in connection with their communication with the public. One representative of the Socialist Party that I spoke too was acutely aware of the issue, but also indicated he felt the problem should not be overestimated. This is because in his opinion, the party line on many issues is continuously shaped and reshaped in several settings, including media reports, interviews, etc., etc. He did however indicate that there is a boundary that may not be crossed: as a result of the calculation and related work, he felt the manifesto (or parts thereof) should not be reversed⁶⁴. This is the boundary that most parties wish to maintain. Does the RIVM succeed in guarding it?

In this matter, one must make a distinction between the actual manifesto, which is a relatively brief document and perhaps best seen as the tip of the iceberg, and the party commitments that underlie such a manifesto. There are two possible avenues of RIVM influence, which is either directly in the manifesto, or through a more subtle process of the

⁶³ Mr. Ligtoet, RIVM, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

⁶⁴ Mr. Irrgang, The Hague, 12 August 2004.

generation of commitments to policy measures and goals. I have found examples of both, although the first avenue is rare.

To start with the direct influence of the RIVM on the manifestoes, all parties stress how their manifestoes are a party product, and a party product alone. Several of my interviewees indicated that they had completed their manifestoes by the time they submitted them to the RIVM. Hence no influence was possible anymore.

“The calculation is not allowed to be at odds with our manifesto. [...] We see the calculation not such much as a changing of our manifesto, we see it as a sharpening of the manifesto.”⁶⁵

Other parties however, submitted draft manifestoes to RIVM, and in at least one case, ideas for changes to the draft manifesto gathered from the RIVM were amongst the amendments sent to the party congress by the party bureau. The case involved concerns the party’s desire for a prohibition of the import of ‘dirty power’ to the Netherlands. What was intended is a prohibition of power imports from France, where nuclear power plants are used to generate electricity. As there almost was political consensus in the Netherlands at the time that the country’s own nuclear power facilities should (eventually) be abolished, it does make sense to start questioning the pedigree of power imports as well. RIVM officials indicated however that a prohibition of dirty power imports was legally impossible under European Union law; this was not a measure that could be calculated. Instead, they proposed to replace the prohibition with an import levy on dirty power so as to decrease its use. This was then calculated as part of the party’s package and the manifesto was subsequently altered.

It is interesting to notice how one of my interviewees saw possible alterations of the manifesto as something that the RIVM, not the party itself should be cautious of:

“RIVM should give a signal when this threatens to happen”.⁶⁶

The lower part of the iceberg is obviously the biggest chunk. Under the tip of the iceberg is a big layer of statements by party leaders, be it in parliament or not. The status of such statement is not always that clear, as parties tend to have different wings trying to pull the party in a certain direction. When I asked about the influence of the RIVM on their ideas, In addition, some saw an ‘unbreakable connection’ between their vision and the measures that RIVM calculates:

“There is no risk of your vision moving to the background, what happens in the calculation exercise is that you get a look in the mirror as to what your vision means in a concrete case, your choices are in an unbreakable connection with your vision.”⁶⁷

Most of my interviewees stressed the fact that the RIVM is only one of various parties they consult with, alongside a range of ngo’s, party members with professional expertise, etc. Although this sounds convincing at first, I did however notice that such consultations are for various, but not all parties, placed in different organizational locations than the manifesto calculation. Consultations with ngo’s etc. are the prerogative of the party

⁶⁵ Mr. Pol, Den Haag, 7 September 2004.

⁶⁶ Mr. Pol, Den Haag, 7 September 2004.

⁶⁷ Mr. Stellingwerf, Ede, 6 September 2004.

commission responsible for drafting the manifesto, the manifesto calculation is much more a matter for sitting MP's. This too appears to be one reason of concern for the VVD. The former VVD spokesman I spoke on this matter said:

*"In 1998, the calculation contained many things that are not in our manifesto. The calculation is based on an explanation of the manifesto by a few members of the party, and this nothing to do with the manifesto nor with the members of the party. Something is either in the manifesto or not, one cannot add things to it. I have a philosophical objection to this. [...] The people involved in the calculation have not been mandated to do this by their party, there is a real threat of hobbyism."*⁶⁸

Two other examples illustrate areas where the influence of the RIVM on political parties may have indeed become rather large and potentially debatable. One is a levy on car ownership and/or car driving, where the RIVM under the motto of creating an equal playing field, advised all parties to introduce such a levy in a specific form, which implied that the first so many thousand kilometers would be free of charge. This is debatable practice because it reduces the differences between political parties. The second example relates to the desire of one political party to stimulate energy saving by investing 50 million EUROS. Here the RIVM experts indicated that money was not the problem but other issues. In reply, this party indicated that it would like to have the RIVM's advice on other cost-effective environmental measures and the RIVM obliged. Some of the RIVM staff I interviewed see a risk here, but they indicated that the parties are mature enough to determine whether or not certain ideas the RIVM presents to them are worth following or not. One of them presented an example where most parties did not follow RIVM advice:

"[...] take the issue of CO-2 storage that we told all parties about. Only D66 adopted it. CPB did not think much of it, but we studied the matter and concluded it would be feasible: there is enough space, how much money it would cost is known and there have been pilots with the method. The fact that there could be social resistance against it, leads to some remarks in our texts, we hint at it".⁶⁹

The quote above indicates that some RIVM staff actively presented options to the political parties. It appears that this is not a consistent pattern, that there are individual differences between various RIVM staff in terms of style. Some are more advisory orientated; others play the role of referee. The latter implies a greater role for the parties themselves:

"Initially they asked us to select options for them: please do what is best for us. We felt uncomfortable in the situation. We have a certain relationship; we must take care not to end up being a political advisor to a party. This is possible if your counterpart is simply open to every idea, or has a huge bag of money".⁷⁰

"We were sharp when it came to the answers to political parties; we saw our role as evaluators not as advisors. ... If the parties said they wanted to connect to current

⁶⁸ Mr. Klein Molenkamp, Rhon, 8 September 2004.

⁶⁹ Mr. Honig, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

⁷⁰ Mr. Wieringa, RIVM, Bilthoven, 31 August 2004.

policies, then we did show them what the measures were that were connected to this idea. We showed packages of measures”⁷¹.

Obviously, the risk of RIVM influence on political parties is lesser when the style of RIVM staff is more one of a referee than one of a consultant. Despite that being the case, it is easy to foresee that the process has a great potential to result in a convergence of plans amongst political parties. Some of the experts involved:

“There may be a risk of all manifestoes becoming more alike, take the issues of charges, they receive more and more attention. At RIVM we have a range of options and all parties pick their preferred shape and form. This effect may occur over time.”⁷²

“Working with a party like Groen Links implies that the instruments that the CPB are stretched to their maximum capability, this sometimes leads to eye openers, to a mutual learning process although the RIVM is more active in supporting parties than the CPB. Groen Links has moved more towards financial instruments”.⁷³

In light of the information presented in this paragraph, it becomes interesting to ask the question about structuration. Does the bureaucratic discourse, that is strongly present in the rules that are supposed to guide the calculation process indeed steer it or is the way the process occurs more a reflection of another discourse? That is the question I present in the next paragraph.

4.3 Trespassing boundaries: technocracy, not bureaucracy

My conclusion from comparing the RIVM’s work in the case of election manifestoes is that the bureau’s approach comes closest to the ‘technocracy’ model. Although it is true that none of the parties involved advocates replacement of politicians with experts, the desire to discipline politicians is undeniable. Most of the interviewees indicate that politicians are irresponsible to some degree, be it by promising contradictory goals or by hiding the costs of their manifestoes:

“Yes the calculation filters out unfounded promises; politicians have a tendency to use slogans and to simply shout stuff. So it is good that someone asks: those wind-mills, how do you pay for them, where will you put them?”⁷⁴.

“Politicians have a tendency to highlight the stronger points of their manifestoes and hide the weaker points. In the calculation process you really have to prove your assertions”⁷⁵.

The calculation of election manifestoes can be seen as an attempt to discipline political parties, to make them stick to the goals of environmental policy as they have basically stood since 1989 or to make the goals even more stringent. This break of the authority rule arises because parties can get a favorable discussion from the RIVM by introducing

⁷¹ Mr. Ligtoet, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

⁷² Mr. Honig, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

⁷³ Mr. Okker, Den Haag, 11 August 2004.

⁷⁴ Mr. Irrgang, The Hague, 12 August 2004.

⁷⁵ Mr. Honig, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

more stringent goals, by adding instruments and by adding money to the budget for environmental measures. There is no attempt to start discussing the goals and in that sense, RIVM staff feels free to impose their understanding of the public good.

Typical for this is the way the interaction process between RIVM and politicians starts. RIVM sends them a note, the 'Note on policy shortages Nature and Environment in 2010'⁷⁶. This note indicates the areas where additional policy measures should be taken to stay on course of previously set government targets. In response to this conclusion, RIVM staff indicated that various environmental goals are binding because of international treaties and secondly that the RIVM is there to map the balance that is struck between ecology-economy and social quality⁷⁷.

Furthermore, as an information rule, 'values' are dealt with in the calculation exercise by reducing them to measurable units (concretization) and in the process, a strong distinction is made between 'merely' intentional statements and 'actual' measures. I presented the following statement to the interviewees:

"In operationalizing the manifesto, the vision that a party has in regard of environmental problems is moved to the background, there is no room for this vision in the discussions with the RIVM".

Of the seven RIVM staff I interviewed and that replied to this statement, only one agreed to this statement. Of the seven non-RIVM staff that replied, three agreed (see next paragraph). I tend to support the position of those who agree to this statement. This because in the process, a strong distinction is made between 'merely' intentional statements and 'actual' measures, which reduces visions to sets of measures, whereas they are fundamentally broader.

*"Some items or statements have political meaning, but RIVM interprets such statements as meaning nothing. It is sometimes of political relevance to say something in a certain way, but not according to the RIVM. The issue at stake is the one of symbols, or imagery. Take the issue of deposits on bottles. It may have little environmental impact, but for the mentality of the population it may be very important. There is a difference between the political work and the RIVM"*⁷⁸.

In the process, the ideological component has a tendency to disappear, at least to some of our interviewees:

*"In making visions concrete, these may indeed move to the background. Parties tend to come with similar measures regardless of ideological differences. The vision has not disappeared, but in practice it does not matter a great deal. One can not escape this because on the basis of visions we would not know what to calculate, it has to be quantified"*⁷⁹.

⁷⁶ 'Notitie Beleidstekorten Natuur en Milieu in 2010'. Sent to all political parties on 21 November 2001.

⁷⁷ Response to an earlier draft by mr. Petersen and mr. Maas ((RIVM), e-mail 4 January 2005.

⁷⁸ Mr. Brink, Bilthoven, 31 August 2004.

⁷⁹ Mr. Pol, The Hague, 7 September 2004.

The opposite position is also found amongst our interviews. Several of them find the calculation process a way to bring the differences between the parties into focus more sharply.

*“The calculation exercise forces parties not to abandon their vision but rather to make their views more concrete”.*⁸⁰

A matter worth mentioning here is how RIVM staff see the role of their own political affiliations in the process. I have not systematically studied this but the issue did come up in one of the interviews I had:

*“I am a party member myself but I know how to separate these issues. I have been open about it to my supervisors.”*⁸¹

Party membership is thus considered worth mentioning internally, but largely seen as a private matter. I found no indications that the politicians involved are greatly interested in the party backgrounds of RIVM. Says one of the people involved from the side of the political parties:

*“I have never had the feeling that the RIVM had a predetermined opinion, that would be strategically silly because one never knows which parties are in control after the elections”.*⁸²

Does this then mean that RIVM is value-neutral? Not necessarily:

*“We are the Environment and Nature Assessment Office, this gives us a certain view on the world, the parties know this beforehand. I do have the illusion that I am unprejudiced, but you look at it from the nature and environment perspective’.[...] Nature management by farmers, it is an illusion to expect that this purports biodiversity. The main target would be farming, but at some point there are limits.... The issue is highly politicized, we are being accused of making the EHS into a dogma”.*⁸³

4.4 Conclusion

The similarity to the technocracy model is striking from the perspective that the RIVM is part of a bureaucracy, namely a Ministry. One would therefore be expecting that this model held greatest currency. To some extent this is true. The RIVM staff there does consist of knowledge workers that are hired at the service of political power. At least rhetorically, the institute places itself outside the realm of the issue of values in the case of calculating election manifestoes. It is clear that the potential tensions between CPB and RIVM are ‘solved’ by assigning turf to each other (RIVM stays out of economics, CPB out of environment – at least largely). Because of their status as public officials, RIVM staff enjoys privileges in terms of information that the ordinary public does not have (e.g. on Cabinet decisions). Also, it is clear that several of the larger political parties (PvdA and VVD) consider the bureaucratic model more suitable for the RIVM and one of them (PvdA) appears to be convinced that that model describes the work of the

⁸⁰ Mr. Honig, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

⁸¹ Mr. Honig, Bilthoven, 8 September 2004.

⁸² Mr. Koppelaar, Den Haag, 30 August 2004.

⁸³ Mr. Lammers, Bilthoven, 13 September 2004.

RIVM on election manifestoes in a suitable fashion. On the other hand, the RIVM staff is not involved in rule- or instruction making for implementing bodies, and the VVD clearly experiences the calculation work on its manifesto as a trespassing of the bureaucratic model. What distinguishes the RIVM most from the bureaucratic model however is the fact that the RIVM is not value neutral at all, but in fact acts as an enforcer of previously established stringent environmental policies, at least in this particular case.

5. Reflection

5.1 Introduction

In this final paragraph, I want to close this report by highlighting two topics. The first is the matter of evaluation. If indeed the calculation exercise fits the technocratic pattern, is that necessarily bad. The second topic is the one of the future direction for the RIVM, or more precisely the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP) as it is called since 2005. In my conversations with RIVM staff, they have indicated what they saw as the direction ahead for the RIVM in terms of the models introduced in the theoretical framework of this report. I will discuss the backgrounds of the technocratic nature of the calculation work and then assess whether the desired model for RIVM holds any promise.

5.2 Evaluation

For my evaluation of the calculation process, I rely on three sources. The first is an evaluation done by the RIVM itself. Secondly, I have presented almost all of my interviewees⁸⁴ a set of statements that are intended to evoke their thoughts on the calculation work. Finally, the theoretical framework introduced several ‘new’ evaluation criteria that I will use to assess performance of the RIVM in this particular case.

RIVM questionnaire

The RIVM undertook an evaluation of the project afterwards by means of sending a questionnaire to those involved. One set of questions was intended to gauge the general satisfaction of those involved, another is the vision that those involved have of the function of the exercise, and a third topic is ways to improve the calculation work.

The RIVM-staff involved indicated that they had felt that the calculation exercise had been an interesting project. The remarks from the political parties are generally positive too. It is interesting but probably very humane to see them make various remarks about proposals for measures made by competing parties, that to their mind are not sufficiently criticized by the RIVM. The people involved appear to have held different expectations about the function of the calculation work. One RIVM expert clearly assumed a one-way learning experience for the political parties.

“The direct interaction with the political parties was stimulating. I had the impression that the parties have learned a lot from the exercise”⁸⁵.

This impression is reinforced by his remark that

“Our idea to fill the shop window with instruments and then let the parties chose, has not worked [...]. Parties tended to indicate rather vaguely what they wanted

⁸⁴ In some cases, there was too little time available for the interview.

⁸⁵ Evaluation form by one RIVM member of staff, 10 June 2002.

(whereas the instruments in the window shop are very concrete) or (especially Green Left) they chose instruments that were not in the window shop”⁸⁶.

The representative of the Christian Union also used learning metaphor:

“The value of the report is not only in attention and publicity, but also in a learning process and having to motivate certain choices”⁸⁷.

The Social Democrats however saw their relationship with the RIVM differently. One of them remarked that the RIVM:

“Has made a good effort to judge political formulations, that are not always quantifiable. Real conclusions have not been reached, but that was not the purpose of the exercise. The RIVM’s role is to gather the facts (based or not on models or expert judgment) and leave the conclusions to the voter”⁸⁸.

Remarkably, the RIVM staff is not convinced that they were sufficiently able to take political visions into account, whereas representatives of political parties say the opposite. The RIVM expert that was just quoted:

“a weak point in the exercise to my mind is the scoring of visions. If you, as a political party are aware of which measures score well (buying up cattle, levies on pesticides, subsidizing ecological agriculture), then the RIVM gives you many environment kudos. Whereas there are many ‘soft’ and non-calculable measures and visions”⁸⁹.

The social democrats and representative of the Christian Union however indicate satisfaction about the possibilities for giving visions. They do however agree to the topic of predictability:

“on the basis of the report building blocks National Environmental Policy Plan 4, the environmental balance, and the environmental outlook, we were able to predict the issues that would receive consideration”⁹⁰.

In terms of improvement, one RIVM member of staff indicated that he had felt a desire to access the election manifesto directly, rather than depending on what his colleague had gathered from the election manifestoes:

“[...] another disadvantage is that as an assessor you loose sight of the program as a whole, you can in fact only judge measures if you know the manifesto as a whole”⁹¹.

The political parties express a desire for even further going assessment. The Social Democrats’ representative, along side the Christian Union representative, highlights the issue of enforcement, which is indeed a weak issue in Dutch environmental policy.

“Enforcement has not been discussed explicitly, whereas this is a condition sine qua non for successful policy”⁹².

⁸⁶ Evaluation form by one RIVM member of staff, 10 June 2002.

⁸⁷ Evaluation form by one representative of a political party (assistant to MP), June 2002.

⁸⁸ Evaluation form by one representative of a political party (assistant to MP), 20 June 2002.

⁸⁹ Evaluation form by one RIVM member of staff, 10 June 2002.

⁹⁰ Evaluation form by one representative of a political party (assistant to MP), 20 June 2002.

⁹¹ Evaluation form by one RIVM member of staff, 10 June 2002.

The implicit recommendation here is that the RIVM should also ex ante assess the implementability and enforceability of policies.

List of statements

As part of my interviews with those involved, I have presented the interviewees a set of statements that they could agree or disagree to. In many cases, the interviewees gave further comments and I have used these extensively throughout this text. However, I find that the analysis of the answers, when split across RIVM and non-RIVM staff, generates some interesting findings and I want to briefly discuss these outcomes. The statements I presented to the interviewees are as follows:

Statement 1 *Operationalization of election manifestoes is a good thing because it filters out unfounded election promises.*

Statement 2 *Through operationalization, the political vision of a party on environmental problems moves to the background, visions have no place in the discussions with the RIVM.*

Statement 3 *Operationalization of election manifestoes is so much work that only the larger parties can afford it, and smaller parties are at a disadvantage.*

Statement 4 *The RIVM never presses their own view of environmental problems on to political parties when operationalizing manifestoes. The RIVM operates in a value neutral fashion and that is the way it should be⁹³.*

Statement 5 *Operationalization makes the formation of government coalitions after elections easier.*

Statement 6 *Operationalization diminishes variety because the parties choose similar policy options after consultations about what works and what does not.*

Statement 7 *Political parties sometime ask the RIVM to fill in 'policy discretion'. The RIVM then gives useful advice.*

Statement 8 *Parties change the content of their manifestoes by operationalization.*

Statement 9 *Parties are fully capable of explaining the operationalization to the voter.*

Statement 10 *Operationalization is a matter for a small group of representatives of one party. However, they are fully capable to present the outcomes to the other members of the party⁹⁴.*

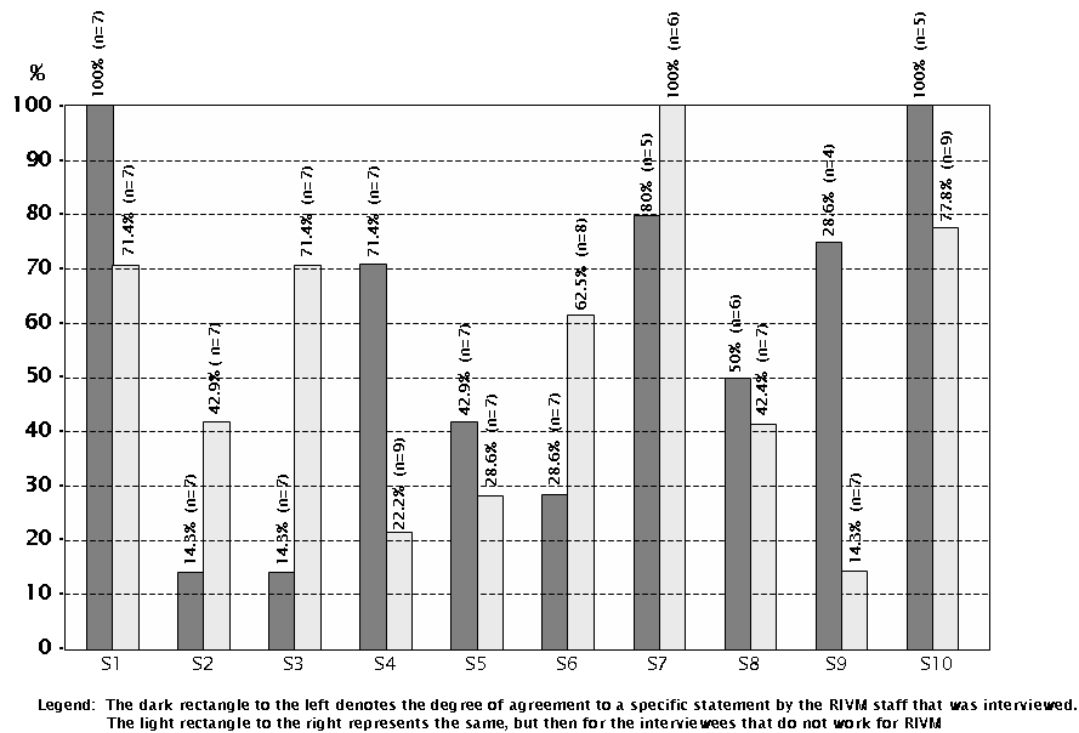
The reader will see that most of the issues addressed in this report are presented in the statements. The figure below denotes the degree to which the interviewees agreed to the statements. The number of interviewees differs somewhat per question. This is partly due to the fact that not all interviewees felt capable of replying to all statements. In order

⁹² Evaluation form by one representative of a political party (assistant to MP), 20 June 2002.

⁹³ This statement actually consists of two parts. In several cases, my interviewees gave a separate answer for the first and the second part. I have scored these answers separately too, implying that in some cases there is a large number of answers than interviewees.

⁹⁴ Idem.

to see whether there were any differences in perceptions of the RIVM staff and the people involved from the side of the political parties, I have analyzed the answers of these groups separately. Because of the small number of respondents, I have not endeavored to perform statistical analysis. The reader should also be aware that despite various attempts, it was impossible to interview a representative of two non-participating parties, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn and the Christian Democrats. This may result in a certain bias of the outcomes amongst interviewees from the political side towards the positive.



Agreement

For several statements (S1, S5, S7, S8, and S10), RIVM and non-RIVM staff answered in a more or less similar fashion. Statement 1 meets with broad agreement. This statement is about the disciplining effect of the calculation exercise as it suggests that the calculation process has the function of weeding out unfounded promises.

Statement 5, which suggests that the calculation work is helpful in Cabinet formation after elections meets with relatively little agreement. I should add that several respondents that did agree to the statement specified later that they thought the statement was truer for the CPB calculations than for the RIVM calculations.

Statement 7, which suggests that the RIVM helps political parties devise measures and is of useful assistance meets with resounding approval. This fits the pattern sketched above and suggests that the predominant style of RIVM staff is advisory rather than as a referee.

Statement 8 is about the question whether or not the election manifestoes are changed in the process of calculation. About half of the interviewees says that this is indeed the case, and this does not appear to be fundamentally different from RIVM and non-RIVM staff.

Statement 10 also meets with agreement from RIVM staff and non-RIVM staff alike. The statement points at the relatively small group of people involved, and to the fact that these people are able to communicate the outcomes to the rest of the party. It is a pity that this statement actually contains two statements. The agreement to the statement overall stems from the first bit, with most RIVM staff indicating that they can not judge whether or not the party people involved communicate outcomes to the rest of the party. Most party representatives also agreed to the second bit of the statement, but then one needs to keep in mind that not agreeing to this statement could be seen as a disqualification of their own work.

Varying degrees of agreement

Perhaps more interesting from the perspective of boundary work are the statements where the RIVM staff and non-RIVM staff give varying degrees of agreement (S2, S3, S4, S6, and S9).

Statement 2 is about the displacement of values in the calculation process. Only a small minority of RIVM staff sees this occurring, but almost half of the interviewees from the political spectrum agree that this happens.

Statement 3 is about the position of small parties. Here too only a small fraction of RIVM staff sees a problem with the potentially disadvantageous position of small parties, whereas a large majority of the political representatives saw this problem.

Statement 4 is about the value neutral character of the work that RIVM staff do in the course of calculating election manifestoes. Here a large majority of RIVM staff agree that they operate in a value neutral fashion, but only a small minority of the interviewees from the political spectrum agree.

Statement 6 is about the uniforming character of the calculation work. Whereas only one third of the RIVM staff sees this happening, about two thirds of the non-RIVM staff thinks this is the case.

Statement 9 finally is about the ability to communicate the outcomes of the exercise to the voter. Not many RIVM staff were able to answer this statement, but the majority had a positive idea about this. A large majority of the interviewees from the political side however disagreed to the statement, with about 85% of the interviewees suggesting that the outcomes cannot be communicated to the voter.

Interpretation

On the whole, RIVM staff are more positive about the calculation work than their political counterparts. They are more optimistic about the possibilities to explain the outcomes to the voter, which is in fact the role politicians would have in a technocratic discourse, they consider themselves more neutral than politicians do, they don't see displacement of values as much as the politicians do, don't think the calculation work will work to erase differences between parties and don't consider small parties to be at a disadvantage as much as the political interviewees do.

The criteria specified in the theoretical framework

It is clear that in the case of the RIVM (at least the calculation of election manifestoes) co-construction of policy and science takes place. The RIVM itself has played an important role in underpinning environmental policies and these policies are an important part of the *raison d'être* for the RIVM. The relevant criteria for judging boundary work under this condition were: the selective consideration of knowledge, the treatment of competing scientific approaches, and the exclusion of viable policy options *a priori*. Looking from those criteria, the calculation exercise could be vulnerable in the sense that the RIVM uses mainly its own expertise in the calculation exercise. Competing scientific approaches are not addressed openly but indoor and then only for matters where the institute feels it is a relatively outsider (water management). Whether or not the RIVM excludes viable policy options is difficult to say. The RIVM does decide to some extent over what is realistic and what is not. A rather radical idea such as an open space charge is calculated, whereas other measures are not calculated. It does seem however that the RIVM's work may result in a certain level uniformity amongst the parties involved, plus the desire to help the voter may turn the voter into a 'lazy voter' and may make the media lazy as well. For certain, independent critical societal debate is not stimulated in this fashion.

5.3 Looking ahead

The RIVM is no stranger to boundary work. Hajer (1995) described how the institute, together with the Department of the Environment and helped by a wave of public concern over environmental matters support, played an important role in the formulation of environmental policy goals in the Netherlands. The institute played an important role in connecting environmental problems that were previously considered to be separate and by introducing policy goals on the basis of the concept 'carrying capacity'. Many of the goals of the first National Environmental Policy Plan (1989) are still standing, and their deadline (often 2010) is approaching. Officials at RIVM indicated that in their perception, the RIVM played the role of environmental advocate in the 1980s. As part of their desire to equal CPB in terms of status and importance, the RIVM (at least its environmental section) developed a desire to obtain 'Planning Bureau' status, which it obtained in 1994. With this new status belongs a new role for the RIVM according to these officials, more neutral, less aimed at advocacy⁹⁵. When presented with the full typology as developed by Hoppe (2002), high ranking RIVM officials indicated they were looking for a move towards what Hoppe called the 'policy-learning model'. This indication is interesting because of the four 'moderate' models described by Hoppe, this particular one is closest to the extreme end of technocracy.

What does the policy-learning model encompass? It differs from technocracy in the fact that it assumes the possibility of dialogue between policy makers and experts, "*all actors are constructed as scholars, in one sense, engaged in a process of social learning*"

⁹⁵ Another relevant event was the public criticism that the RIVM experienced in the late 1990s because of supposedly sloppy statistics (an employee went public with grave allegations of 'lying and cheating'). The RIVM undertook great effort to become more transparent in terms of the uncertainties underlying its assessment and predictions.

through social debat” (ibid, 41). Policy programs in this model are sets of hypotheses about collective action and outcomes in the real world and are intended as experiments. The policy-learning model, according to Hoppe, implies a certain degree of shared specialization in a certain area of government activity (like environmental policy). Experts and policymakers in such a field are expected to collectively develop hypotheses and experiments from a shared set of assumptions and beliefs, some of them very fundamental (normative core), others more instrumental and a ‘heuristic layer’ that provides for increased problem capacity. Policy orientated learning in teams of like-minded politicians, administrators and experts is supposed to be possible. The policy learning model calls for professional platforms for technical communities in policy subsystems and mutual trust between experts and policymakers (ibid.: 46).

Reflecting upon this description I find the terms social learning and social debate too broad for what Hoppe describes. First of all, I would consider learning amongst members of a policy community a quite meager interpretation and cannot see why social learning and debate should not involve interest groups and ordinary citizens. Secondly I do not see why social learning should be essentially limited to the outer shell(s) of the belief systems of particular policy communities, I would consider social learning and debate about the core values of such a community more beneficial than learning at the fringes.

Armed with the just described model plus additions and RIVM’s desire in mind I take a look at the way the calculation of election manifestoes could take place in the future. After that, I broaden the discussion somewhat by looking at the hurdles and possibilities that can be derived from the calculation exercise for the broader change agenda towards a policy-learning model by the RIVM.

In terms of the calculation exercise, I find a statement of one of my interviewees a good starting point. He said the following:

*“Parties always use experts in the course of preparing election manifestoes, for instance professors that are linked to them. That is not transparent at all, so what is the alternative for calculations by the RIVM?”*⁹⁶

Implicit in this statement is the assertion that the calculation by the RIVM adds a certain degree of transparency to the preparation of election manifestoes. I agree to the importance of transparency but cannot agree that the way RIVM currently undertakes its calculation is transparent; in fact, as far as the preparation of a party manifesto should be regarded as a task for a political party itself, RIVM potentially undermines the mechanisms available in the political parties to secure a transparent process. In my opinion there are two ways of going about this. The first is to actually stop the calculation work completely and retreat to the normal tasks that the institute has in policy processes, which are largely related to the monitoring of policy progress. It is clear from the comments of the interviewees of the political spectrum that they see RIVM as a potential ally in this task, especially vis-à-vis some of the larger ministries.

“The added value of the exercise is that no unfounded promises are made in election manifestoes and that not only officials at the ministry check the feasibility of political proposals. We see some difference between the Ministry of Finance, where they are

⁹⁶ Mr. Van der Vlist, Den Haag, 11 August 2004.

*very open, and the Ministries of Environment, Traffic and Water Management and Agriculture.... Compared to those ministries, the RIVM is a relief to work with”.*⁹⁷

The second way would be to let go of the disciplining character and open the calculation exercise far more than currently (boundary rules, information rules) for political steering and steering by ngo's or even ordinary citizens. Currently, the models that RIVM uses tend to structure the questions that are asked to the political parties, and it seems to me that this is an important factor that drives the process towards technocracy. Obviously, especially the quantitative models have their limitations but that is much less the case for the qualitative models that should be used more extensively when the process becomes steered more by the political parties. The answer to certain desires by political parties, such as the abolishment of the import of dirty power, could then consist of a collective puzzling exercise of how this goal could be achieved anyhow, despite legal hurdles such as the ones imposed by the European Union. Ngo's could play a role in this, certainly if a rich variety of positions is maintained and for instance one ngo is included that is extremely in favour of nuclear power generation. As one of my interviewees said, this is about the debate behind the goals:

*“My background is the Ecological Main Structure, this is very important for biodiversity which RIVM finds crucial. All parties subscribe to it in their manifesto, whereas if one looks at the instruments applied ... they are at odds with the goals. Behind it is an interesting debate. If a politician is not interested in biodiversity, if he says that the Netherlands should become a beautiful park ... you start judging things very differently. But all parties themselves have this dogma in their manifesto.”*⁹⁸

The advantage of the first way over the second is that the RIVM avoids difficult discussions over its position in relation to Parliament. That is because if the RIVM opts for the second way, it runs the risk of being seen as a threat to Parliament as the forum for public debate. This already leads to the more fundamental discussion on RIVM's future position and what we can learn – of the possibly unique- case of calculating election manifestoes. Several elements transpire from the exercise of calculating election manifestoes. The first is that a certain dose of technocracy is apparently not considered very problematic by most of my interviewees. Therefore, in connection with the remarks about potential tensions with Parliament that I have just made, one would have to make sure that there is a clear demand for an RIVM role as an active participant and initiator of public debate. This demand may not be as big as one would think. Secondly, both the role of critical assessor of government policies and the role of stimulator of public debate would fit the policy-learning model (perhaps a very critical assessment of goals achievement in nature policy for instance is one of the best catalysts for such debate), but they would require different capabilities from the RIVM. The first way, which is relatively more an outsider approach, would probably fit better to the current apparatus of models and the capabilities of personnel. The second would probably not require much of the current model infrastructure, but more political skills of the RIVM. The example of calculating manifestoes shows that the skills and approaches of RIVM staff vary greatly and that this variation is at least partially responsible for a certain variation in

⁹⁷ Mrs. Streefkerk, Den Haag, 1 September 2004.

⁹⁸ Mr. Lammers, Bilthoven, 13 September 2004.

advisory style. A more uniform approach in line with the predominant approach to policy advice would probably be warranted if RIVM seriously pursues its new approach.

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Appendix I. Interviewees

Name	Organization	Place and date
1 Biggelaar, mr. A. van den	Stichting Natuur en Milieu (director)	Utrecht, 31 August 2004
2 Brink, mr. C-J.	RIVM	Bilthoven, 31 August 2004
3 Egmond, N.D. van	RIVM (director Environmental Branch)	Bilthoven, 13 September 2004
4 Gerwen, mr. O-J. van	RIVM (project leader calculator project 2002)	Bilthoven, 31 August 2004
5 Irrgang, mr. E.	Socialistische Partij, delegation to the Second Chamber of Parliament (assistant)	Den Haag, 12 August 2004
6 Honig, mr. E.	RIVM	Bilthoven, 8 September 2004
7 Klein-Molenkamp, mr. J.	VVD, former Member of Parliament	Rhoon, 8 September 2004
8 Koppelaar, mr. R.	Christen Unie, delegation to the Second Chamber of Parliament (assistant)	Den Haag, 30 August 2004
9 Lammers, W.	RIVM	Bilthoven, 13 September 2004
10 Ligtoet, mr. W.	RIVM	Bilthoven, 8 September 2004
11 Okker, mr. R.	Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB)	Den Haag, 11 August 2004
12 Pol, mr. R.	PvdA, delegation to the Second Chamber of Parliament (assistant)	Den Haag, 7 September
13 Stellingwerf, mr. D.	Christen Unie, former Member of Parliament	Ede, 6 September 2004
14 Streefkerk, mrs. M.	Groen Links, delegation to the Second Chamber of Parliament (assistant) and party bureau	Den Haag, 1 September 2004
15 Visser, mr. A.	VVD, Member of Parliament	Den Haag, 9 September 2004
16 Vlist, mr. M.J.	Ministry of Environment, Spatial planning and Housing (VROM, Director General)	Den Haag, 11 August 2004
17 Wieringa, mr. K.	RIVM (project leader calculation project in '94 and '98)	Bilthoven, 31 August 2004
18 Zeijts, mr. H. van	RIVM	Bilthoven, 31 August 2004

stances. The proposals in the election manifestoes are then regarded as proposals for changing government policies with subsequent consequences in the V and K parts of the formula quoted above. Experts in certain fields (climate change, air pollution, traffic) - or rather the laboratories that they belong to - have their own 'models' of the relationship between E, V and K in their respective fields. The character of these models tends to be software with data from measuring points imputed in them, and in a limited number of cases it is not much more than a line of reasoning on how effective certain measures will be (expert judgment). The measuring data used in computer models are often limited in character in the sense that they cover only so much of the Dutch territory⁹⁹. Very often, assumptions need to be made about situations where about no measurements are available. In the process of calculating emissions, i.e. noise data about the sources/causes and the population that is affected are also included (these are often approximations of the real' situation as well) and these are used, together with the data from measurements to arrive at an assessment of impact. In the case of traffic noise for instance, the speed of vehicles is an important factor. If parties propose to set lower speed limits, this connects to a cause of noise disturbance in the model and is therefore assumed to have certain results.

⁹⁹ This is of course not unique to RIVM models.